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CAMBRIDGE TEXTS IN THE HISTORY OF POLITICAL THOUGHT

狄德罗政治著作选

Diderot

Political

Writings

Edited by

JOHN HOPE MASON

and

ROBERT WOKLER 中国政法大学出版社

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Diderot: Political Writings

Denis Diderot (1713 – 84) was one of the most significant figures of the French Enlightenment. His political writings cover the period from the first volume of the *Encyclopédie* (1751), of which he was principal editor, to the third edition of Raynal's *Histoire des Deux Indes* (1780), one of the most widely read books of the pre-revolutionary period. This volume contains the most important of Diderot's articles for the *Encyclopédie*, a substantial number of his contributions to the *Histoire* and the complete texts of his *Supplément au Voyage de Bougainville*, one of his most visionary works, and his *Observations sur le Nakaz*, a precise and detailed political work translated here in English for the first time.

The editors' introduction sets these works in their context and shows the underlying coherence of Diderot's thought. A chronology of events and a list of further reading are included as aids to the reader.

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POLITICAL THOUGHT



DENIS DIDEROT
Political Writings

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剑桥政治思想史原著系列

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在政治理论领域，“剑桥政治思想史原著系列”作为主要的学生教科丛书，如今已牢固确立了其地位。本丛书旨在使学生能够获得从古希腊到 20 世纪初期西方政治思想史方面所有最为重要的原著。它囊括了所有著名的经典原著，但与此同时，它又扩展了传统的评价尺度，以便能够纳入范围广泛、不那么出名的作品。而在此之前，这些作品中有许多从未有过现代英文版本可资利用。只要可能，所选原著都会以完整而不删节的形式出版，其中的译作则是专门为本丛书的目的而安排。每一本书都有一个评论性的导言，加上历史年表、生平梗概、进一步阅读指南，以及必要的词汇表和原文注解。本丛书的最终目的是，为西方政治思想的整个发展脉络提供一个清晰的轮廓。

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Foreword

Towards the end of his life, after he had completed his editorial labours for the *Encyclopédie*, Diderot wrote extensively about politics. Some of his earlier writings on the subject, though influential, were unoriginal; much of his later work was unpublished in his lifetime. Our selection of texts has been formed from those which were the most important when they appeared, or which give the fullest treatment of his political thought. The first category includes his articles for the *Encyclopédie* and his contributions to the *Histoire des Deux Indes*, works which were widely circulated and attracted much attention. The second category includes the *Supplément au Voyage de Bougainville*, the most speculative of his political writings, and the *Observations sur le Nakaz*, his most precise, detailed and also broadest discussion of contemporary issues.

Any selection of course entails omission, and ours does scant justice to the range of Diderot's literary styles and skills, for instance the conversational tone of his *Mémoires pour Catherine II* or the polemical quality of the *Apologie de l'abbé Galiani*, a defence of Galiani's critique of the physiocrats. If Diderot's forceful attack against the despotism of Frederick II in his *Pages contre un tyran* has its counterpart in the *Histoire des Deux Indes*, nothing in our selection can capture the idiosyncratic flavour of his last work, the *Essai sur les règnes de Claude et de Néron* (1782), largely devoted to Seneca, but interspersed with reflections on the role of the *philosophe* in times of oppression and a final volley in the protracted quarrel with Rousseau. Since our aim has been to convey Diderot's political thought, rather than his literary personality, such exclusions are inevitable. Among these omitted texts, moreover, the *Mémoires* and *Essai* are each too long to be included in a collection of

this kind, and the *Apologie* and *Pages contre un tyran* both form commentaries on another author and cannot be read properly apart from the writings to which they refer.

While we have worked together closely and produced the introduction jointly, it may be noted that the translations of the *Observations sur le Nakaz* and the *Histoire de Deux Indes* are chiefly by JHM, and those from the *Encyclopédie* and of the *Supplément* are mainly by RW. We are grateful to Karen Hall for typing much of the material in this volume, and to Derek Beales and Raymond Geuss for their comments on an earlier draft.

Introduction

The Encyclopédie

The reign of Louis XIV, *le roi soleil*, may have marked the epitome of absolutist government in Europe, but that achievement did not survive him. Although monarchical power, buttressed by divine right, had become unlimited in theory, it was in practice often ignored and occasionally even defied. The separate regions of France preserved their own traditions and administration, while the legal and tax privileges of the hereditary nobility and Church ensured that some of the most prosperous sections of society retained a vested interest in resisting the dominance of the throne. In the eighteenth century, moreover, new intellectual forces appeared which undermined the spiritual and moral authority of the French state. In their battle against superstition and intolerance, and by their call for a rational exercise of power, the *philosophes* of the Enlightenment challenged the assumptions of absolutism and condemned the brutalities of autocratic rule. Montesquieu, Voltaire and Rousseau each championed liberal principles of toleration against religious bigotry and the despotic tendencies of unrestrained government, and they were rightly perceived by their contemporaries as opponents of the same dark forces of prejudice and injustice which still held sway under the *ancien régime*. Although they envisaged disparate, even incompatible, programmes of reform, they were united in seeing the prevalent institutions of politics, religion and society as corrupt. Each espoused ideals of freedom against the despotisms of their day, and at least to this extent upheld a common cause of enlightenment.

No one in the eighteenth century promoted that cause more vigorously than Diderot. For more than twenty years, from the mid 1740s until the late 1760s, he was absorbed by the ordeals of editing and contributing to the greatest literary monument of the eighteenth century. Like the Crystal Palace built a century later to pay tribute to an Age of Industry, the *Encyclopédie* was assembled as an exhibition and celebration of an Age of Reason and Invention. Originally conceived as a French translation of Chambers' *Cyclopaedia*, the work underwent remarkable expansion after Diderot was appointed editor, jointly with d'Alembert, in 1747. The first volume was published in 1751; the seventeenth, intended to conclude the written text, appeared in 1765. By 1780, when at last completed by others, it came to embrace thirty-five volumes exceeding 20 million words and 2,000 plates. This 'reasoned dictionary of the arts and sciences' was of course a collective venture, composed by a 'society of men of letters' which included Voltaire, Rousseau, d'Holbach, Turgot, Raynal, Toussaint and more than a hundred other authors. A substantial proportion, perhaps one-fifth of the whole text, came to be drafted by a single person, the chevalier de Jaucourt. But it was Diderot who proved the guiding spirit of the enterprise; who fired the enthusiasm of his contributors and subscribers while at the same time whetting the ambitions of his publishers; who attracted sufficient sympathy from the director of publications, Malesherbes, to resist the bans imposed upon it by the Church, Crown and Paris Parlement; who scorned the work's enemies and persisted after they had driven d'Alembert into retirement; who at the outset personally took charge of more articles, covering a wider range of subjects, than any other figure; who ventured to make the *Encyclopédie* not only a lofty compendium of knowledge but also a worldly display of the arts and crafts of his day.

By background and disposition he was well suited to his task. Born in Langres in 1713, he was the devoted son of a master cutler and retained a life-long interest in the manufacturing techniques of ordinary domestic implements and tools. Formally educated in his native city and in Paris, he read widely in classical literature and science – especially Horace and Lucretius, whose ideas would always inform his mature writings. Surrounded by relatives who devoted their lives to the Church, he acquired that distaste for clerical intolerance and the pieties of obscurantism which infuses many of the essays he

drafted for the *Encyclopédie*, and which in other, even bolder, works would incline him towards atheism. Launched upon his career as a writer through translations of such texts as Shaftesbury's *Inquiry concerning Virtue or Merit*, he soon became an expert literary ventriloquist, refashioning the compositions of others so that they might speak in his voice. No one in the Enlightenment achieved greater originality by way of transliteration and commentary, through the reassociation of the ideas of other authors.

Diderot's articles 'Art' in volume 1 and 'Encyclopédie' in volume v illustrate his attachment to the mechanical arts as instruments of scientific discovery and the moral improvement of mankind. He assesses the revolutionary impact of technological innovations and calls for greater co-operation between specialists of different disciplines – more interpenetration of the theory and practice of science, and of liberal with mechanical arts – so that knowledge may be invested in applications which promote public welfare. The dissemination of such useful knowledge formed the central objective of the *Encyclopédie*. To make intelligible the successive achievements of extraordinary individuals which constitute 'the march of the human spirit' is to benefit the general mass of mankind. It shows the value of criticism and reveals how the authoritative precepts of one age become dead dogma to another, lifting the yoke of precedent and pointing the way towards reason. These ideas from the article 'Encyclopédie' recapitulate some of the themes of d'Alembert's 'Discours préliminaire' to the first volume of the *Encyclopédie*, and indeed the two pieces together form a kind of manifesto of the Enlightenment as a whole. Each, coincidentally, draws attention to the philosophy of Rousseau, who, just prior to the publication of the first volume, had produced an account of the moral effects of civilisation (his *Discours sur les sciences et les arts*) which seemed to contradict the very purpose of the *Encyclopédie*. In 1755, when the fifth volume was published, Diderot was still Rousseau's closest friend, but he would soon have occasion to regret his encomium of a man he 'never had the strength to hold back from acclaiming' (p. 26).

If the article 'Encyclopédie' forms a part of his philosophy of history, Diderot's more specifically political contributions concentrate instead on principles such as justice, authority and natural right, illustrated with examples drawn most often from antiquity. These articles are largely second-hand – partly by design, since Diderot was

convinced that a work of reference ought to be inspired by the best authorities, and partly from necessity, since official opposition to the *Encyclopédie* soon deprived him of the services of some liberal theologians who had been responsible for material on the history of political thought. Diderot took over this subject himself, borrowing copiously from Sully, Fontenelle, Bayle, Girard, Buffier and other sources, and relying above all on the political thinker whose authority throughout the first half of the eighteenth century was pre-eminent – that is, Pufendorf. In the article 'Cité' he adopts Pufendorf's formulation of the idea of the state as a corporate body or moral being entrusted with the collective will and assembled force of its various members, and in the article 'Citoyen' he accepts Pufendorf's distinction between the duties of man and those of the citizen, while nevertheless objecting to his views on native-born as opposed to naturalised citizenship. In 'Autorité politique' he subscribes to Pufendorf's conception of the true source of all authority, which must be the consent of the people themselves, rather than nature or force. In relinquishing their liberty to their princes, the inhabitants of civil society act in conformity with right reason and so establish a common power in the public interest. This is the doctrine of the social compact, which binds subjects to their prince, but also princes to their subjects, limiting their authority, as Diderot conceived it, under conditions stipulated by natural law. The moral foundations of the state might thus appear not to need a theological framework. Yet, together with Pufendorf, he contends that subjects retain no right of resistance against the authority they have set up, however despotic they might judge it, since they are bound by religion, reason and nature to abide by their undertakings. Men should remain free in matters of conscience, he observes in his article 'Intolérance' in volume VIII, since conscience can only be enlightened, never constrained, and violence merely renders a man a hypocrite. But he does not follow the Anabaptists or Locke, who held similar views, in suggesting that conscience and good faith may justify a civil right of resistance. The article 'Autorité politique' gave rise to no such implications, though it excited fierce hostility from the supporters of the divine right of kings, which even put the continued publication of the *Encyclopédie* at risk. To allay any misunderstanding, Diderot added, to volume III in an *erratum* (see p. 11), that the consent of subjects to the rule of their princes does not contradict, but rather

confirms, the proposition that real authority stems ultimately from God.

Pufendorf had put forward his account of the popular and contractual foundations of monarchy in conjunction with a theory of human nature and a speculative history of the origins of civil society. Much persuaded by the Hobbesian doctrine of man's fundamental insecurity and selfishness, he nevertheless maintained that Hobbes had been mistaken to suppose that man was by nature a solitary creature whose ambitions incline him towards war, since, on the contrary, the weakness of savages must have led them to seek survival through association with their neighbours, their selfish sociability prompting them to establish and accept the regulations of civil law. In his article 'Droit naturel' Diderot pursues much the same critique of the idea of natural conflict, reproaching Hobbes, whom he portrays as a 'violent interlocutor', for supposing that each person's passions must bring 'terror and confusion to the human race' (pp. 18–19). The Hobbesian thesis is either insane or evil, he observes, for 'man is not just an animal but an animal which thinks', capable of exercising his reason in accordance with justice. In his *Suite de l'Apologie de l'abbé de Prades* of 1752, Diderot had already remarked that the pure state of nature was an *état de troupeau* – a barbarous condition of men living in herds, each individual being motivated by fear and his natural passions alone. But only a contemptible *Hobbit* could suppose that the unlimited power of princes had been established as a remedy for man's original anarchy, since the passage of the human race from an *état de troupeau* to an *état de société policée* – from its natural state to the state of civil society – had come about just because of men's recognition of their need to subject themselves collectively to laws whose beneficial effect was manifest to them all. As Diderot puts this point in the *Observations sur le Nakaz* (LXXI), 'men . . . became aware that they struggled to better effect together, than separately'.

In the 'Droit naturel' he considers how selfish individuals, motivated by private interest, can form such agreements. Before the institution of governments, he claims, justice can only be settled by the tribunal of mankind as a whole. For although 'private wills are suspect . . . the general will is always good' (pp. 19–20), and each of us partakes of that general will by virtue of our shared membership of the human race, which determines what are the inalienable natural rights

and fundamental duties of man. It was in this way that Diderot introduced his idea of the 'volonté générale', a term of scant significance in political thought before the publication of the *Encyclopédie*. In his own article, 'Economie politique', in the same volume, Rousseau employed the term himself for the first time, along lines not dissimilar to those of the 'Droit naturel'. Later, in the *Contrat social*, he was to give a very different meaning to the concept, insisting that it could only be realised within, and never outside, the state.

Diderot's idea of the law of nature was thus conceived as a rational principle of common humanity which restrained the selfishness of individuals and made the establishment of civil society both necessary and possible. Many philosophers of natural law had put forward similar notions before, but from his references and allusions to Pufendorf's work – that is, to both the *De jure naturae et gentium* and the *De officio hominis et civis* – it is clear that his account was principally indebted to this author alone. That debt, however, was by and large indirect, since Diderot drew most of his Pufendorbian principles not from their original source but from Jacob Brucker's *Historia critica philosophiae*, published in five volumes between 1742 and 1744 (with a sixth supplementary tome printed in 1767). This was an erudite work of a Lutheran pastor, himself much inspired by Pufendorf, which Diderot consulted time and again in his contributions; many of his essays amount to little more than plagiarism from Brucker's Latin. Indeed, no other text was pillaged so frequently and at such length by Diderot as the *Historia critica philosophiae*; it is one of the mainsprings of the whole *Encyclopédie*. But while the article 'Hobbisme' is an almost literal translation of Brucker's account of Hobbes, it includes a postscript of Diderot's own conception, comparing the system of Hobbes with that of Rousseau, to the detriment of both thinkers. According to Diderot man is neither naturally good nor naturally wicked, since goodness and evil, together with happiness and misery, are finely balanced in human nature. If Hobbes had falsely supposed that men are by nature vicious, Rousseau had been equally wrong to believe that they always become so in society. For Diderot virtue and vice were at once natural and social, and by his nature man was impelled and enabled to form civil associations which brought both benefits and harm to the human race. A Pufendorbian perspective of a society of selfish agents could therefore be invoked as a corrective not only to Hobbes but to Rousseau as well. With the publication of his

Theory of Moral Sentiments in 1759, Adam Smith made such sceptical principles central to his philosophy and later came, in his *Wealth of Nations*, to envisage the place they occupied among the necessary foundations of commercial society.

It was Rousseau, however, rather than Smith, who lent weight to Diderot's Pufendorbian political theory – and that by way of refutation. For just as Diderot had attempted to rebut both Hobbes and Rousseau in his article 'Hobbisme', so Rousseau, in the draft of his *Contrat social* known as the *Manuscrit de Genève*, sought to challenge Hobbes and Diderot together. Arguing against the 'Droit naturel', he also employed the dialectical approach of the article 'Hobbisme', since he judged Hobbes correct to surmise that outside civil society there could be no agreed principles of law constricting our natural rights, but wrong to imagine that the exercise of such rights unavoidably led to conflict. The idea of natural right was thus a chimerical concept, because it ascribed a moral rule to a state of mere licence, though Diderot had rightly perceived that even in their natural state men could still live in peace. As an alternative to each doctrine Rousseau advanced a theory of benign but amoral human nature, transformed either for better or worse by the establishment of civil society. Both his philosophy of history and his theory of the social contract thus address themes brought to his attention by Diderot's contributions to the *Encyclopédie*.

The Supplément au Voyage de Bougainville

The discovery of the New World prompted much Christian speculation in the sixteenth century as to whether American Indians might fit Aristotle's description of natural slaves. Yet by the eighteenth century new light brought to bear upon such questions made the authority of both Christ and Aristotle appear out of date. Not only were the customs and languages of pagan peoples judged to be as richly diverse as the Christian and civic institutions of the Old World, but to the extent that such peoples were less civilised than Europeans they came increasingly to seem both more free and more content. This changing image of exotic cultures was partly due to the growing sense of pessimism throughout the period about the destiny of Western civilisation – if not of mankind as a whole – and about the decadence which must always follow an epoch's maturity; such ideas indeed

inform many passages of the *Histoire des Deux Indes*. But it was partly due as well to the European fascination with the alternative wonders of youthful societies, whose members were perceived as vigorous, impulsive and healthy, because they were more natural. In the Enlightenment no savage peoples were judged so untainted by sin or vice or the trappings of history as Polynesians. The Pacific Ocean formed the last great frontier of colonial expansion, and the islands which European explorers discovered there in the late eighteenth century seemed closer to the original state of nature than was any other part of the world.

Louis Antoine de Bougainville (1729-1811) had been a mathematician and professional soldier before becoming the first Frenchman to circumnavigate the earth between 1766 and 1769. He was not the first European to set foot in Tahiti, having been just preceded there by Wallis. But the fertile, beautiful and, above all, voluptuous paradise which he found there in 1768 led him to suppose that he had stumbled upon the Garden of Eden. Although his ship stayed only ten days, Bougainville was so fascinated with the sensuality and sexual candour of a people whose 'sole passion was love' that he named their country *Nouvelle Cythère*, after the island devoted to the worship of Aphrodite. By bringing back to France a Tahitian native, Aotourou, who was the first Polynesian to visit the West, he also excited the curiosity of Frenchmen in a savage who proved more erotic than noble, since Aotourou's indiscriminate and shameless attraction to women remained his most conspicuous trait. An anonymous work, purporting to reflect the views of Aotourou on French society, *Le sauvage de Taïti aux français*, was published in 1770, followed the next year by Bougainville's own *Voyage autour du monde*. Diderot drafted a review of the *Voyage*, intended for Grimm's *Correspondance littéraire*, in which the anticolonial stance evident in his contributions to the *Histoire des Deux Indes*, also dating from this period, is sharply defined. 'Ah, monsieur de Bougainville', he laments there, 'Take your ship away from . . . these innocent . . . Tahitians . . . What does your being stronger mean? You cry out against social *Hobbsism* and yet enforce it from nation to nation. Deal with them, take their produce, bring them yours, but do not put them in chains.' A year later he developed these remarks in the elegiac second section of his work entitled 'The Old Man's Farewell'. The review also assesses Bougainville's career and impressions of Tahitian society, including

the practice of polygamy and the consummation in public of sexual intercourse. Since its themes were to be largely recapitulated in the first half of the later text, it may thus be regarded as the initial draft of the *Supplément*.

As with many of his writings, this work also takes up other subjects in which he was then interested. Following a brief love affair with Madame de Maux in 1770, and in the protracted period of negotiations over his daughter's dowry before her marriage in 1772, he was much absorbed by the subject of female sexuality and the legal status of women in a society which accorded their rights to their husbands. In the spring of 1772, after the publication of the *Essai sur le caractère des femmes* by his friend Antoine-Léonard Thomas, he assembled his thoughts in a short essay entitled 'Sur les femmes', in which he remarked that while women were 'more civilised than us on the outside, they have remained true savages within', complaining at the same time of their cruel treatment as imbeciles under most civil laws. The contrasting status of women in Tahiti, where their physical nature remained unrepressed and their sexual intercourse a matter of their own choice, was to figure in the *Supplément* as one of its more prominent features.

It was also in 1772 that Diderot completed two short stories, *Ceci n'est pas un conte* and *Madame de la Carlière*, which portrayed the corruption of natural impulses under the tyranny of social conventions. These stories were circulated, in manuscript, in Grimm's *Correspondance littéraire*, which in 1773 and 1774 similarly circulated, in four instalments, a composition entitled 'The Sequel to the Tales of Monsieur Diderot. Supplement to the Voyage of Bougainville'. Having transformed and enlarged his original review into a work of fiction, Diderot then embarked on still further revisions, including, as a tale within a tale, the episode of Polly Baker. In the *Supplément*, moreover, he refers directly to the six leading characters in the two other stories, while the conclusion of *Madame de la Carlière*, in turn, anticipates the *Supplément*: 'I have my own ideas', remarks its narrator, 'with regard to certain actions which I regard less as human vices than as consequences of our absurd systems of law . . . This . . . will perhaps be made clear another time.' The *Supplément* takes up that subject, and in placing its central exchange of views within the context of a different conversation between two fictional friends, it even reproduces the narrative form of the tale which heralds it. For-

ever teasing his readers to find the meaning of one work implicit in another, Diderot so constructed the *Supplément* that it forms an appendix, not only to Bougainville's description of Tahitian free love in his *Voyage*, but equally to a pair of short stories about presumed sexual misconduct in sophisticated societies. As with the *Encyclopédie*, his meaning here seems in part latent, lying beneath the surface of the text, inscribed in his cross-references.

It has been suggested that a major source of his anthropology in the *Supplément* was the critique of civilisation put forward by Dom Deschamps. Diderot was certainly captivated by this Benedictine monk's philosophy when he first learnt about it around 1770, and he exclaimed that Deschamps's utopia – without kings, priests, magistrates, laws, private property, vice and virtue – was a world for which he had been born. But the most substantial influence on his work has generally been judged that of Rousseau, in so far as the *Supplément* appears to give temporal and geographical specificity to Rousseau's philosophical reconstructions of primitive society in his *Discours sur l'inégalité*. Rousseau himself claimed that the *Discours* was more to Diderot's liking than any of his other writings, even suggesting that a passage of the *Discours* was incorporated on Diderot's advice. In its fundamental contrast of the trappings of culture and civilised morality with the free expression of natural impulses, the *Supplément* does indeed articulate Rousseau's main theme, and in the final section Diderot offers what might be thought a summary of the other work, in his remarks about the 'continual war' following the introduction of 'artificial man' into 'natural man' (see p. 71). The 'Old Man's Farewell' (pp. 41–5) might also be read in conjunction with Rousseau's depiction of nascent society in the second part of the *Discours*, where he remarks that the evidence of known savage societies indicates that the human race was meant to remain in that state forever, since all subsequent progress had in reality led towards the decrepitude of our species. In urging Bougainville's departure, Diderot appears to will away the noxious tides of civilisation which Rousseau had deplored as well. Neither man espoused the idea of a 'noble savage' which was so widely fashionable in the eighteenth century, but Rousseau, in nearly all of his writings, and Diderot, in this work, each put the case for human nature against culture; both were to that extent primitivists.

Yet such analogies should not obscure the crucial differences

between the *Discours* and the *Supplément*. Diderot's image of communal life bears no relation to Rousseau's portrait of mankind's solitary and animal state of nature, nor was it constructed, in Rousseau's fashion, by philosophical abstraction from the contemporary world. It was conceived instead as a social state, forming a part of the same earth at the same time as decadent Europe. Diderot deplored, not Tahiti's evolution, but its conquest. Neither was he mainly concerned with those differences between human nature and civilisation which Rousseau had held to be most central. Except with regard to the institution of monogamous marriage, his discussion of private property is brief and his complaint reserved for its exclusivity rather than the idea of ownership. Although he shared Rousseau's view that mankind's primitive condition must have been freer than it is in European society, he does not depict that loss of freedom, as Rousseau does, in terms of moral inequality and social dependence, but rather as a move from sexuality to religion. The *Discours sur l'inégalité* deals with sex only briefly and with religion scarcely at all. Even Rousseau's discussion of sex in the *Discours* is quite different, since his point is that the sexual impulse is not the source of romantic love, which depends upon unnatural ideas of beauty or merit, while Diderot's principal theme is that sexual attraction is repressed and distorted in civilised society. Where Diderot deplores the sexual despotism of men in the West, Rousseau most characteristically fears the rapacious tyranny of women. In the work's opposition of two contemporary cultures; in its treatment of sexuality as the nexus of one and religion the bond of the other; in its portrayal of incredulous outsiders whose discovery of the values of strangers reveals the absurdity of their own beliefs; in its use of fictional dialogue as a framework for a comparative anthropology, the *Supplément au Voyage de Bougainville* has at least as much in common with Montesquieu's *Lettres persanes* as with Rousseau's *Discours*.

Sexuality and religion are depicted by Diderot as perpetually opposed motives or principles of social life – one a naturally free expression of impulse, the other an artificially enforced subjection to duty. In Tahiti, the public expression of sexual love between boys and girls from the age of puberty was joyously celebrated. Physical beauty is appreciated because of its capacity to excite desire. The sexual passions of women are respected no less than those of men, because they choose their lovers and husbands as much as they are chosen by

them; the affection of partners in marriage is reciprocal. There is neither sin nor crime in promiscuity, fornication, adultery or incest. Because the idea of private property has no place in conjugal love, the Tahitians applaud polygamy and the communal joys of extended family life. Because they share responsibility for their neighbours, they feel no jealousy but instead care for one another out of self-interest, as if all the children of the island were their own. When Bougainville's sailors arrived, the natives' hospitality prompted them to offer their wives, sisters and daughters as eagerly willing partners for the sexual gratification of their guests, thus displaying their good manners in the very act of yielding to temptation.

This conjunction of pleasure with duty is unknown in the society represented by the chaplain. In Christian civilisation, the institution of marriage requires sexual fidelity even when passion is spent. It stipulates that there must be an artificial chain of immutable devotion, contrary to Nature's flux. In making the wife the sexual property of her husband, it transforms a bond of affection into a legal tie over which she has no control. The chaplain himself, on account of his vow of chastity, is prohibited not just all sexual pleasures but the very contemplation of what he is forbidden to enjoy. Subject to the three powers of God, priests and magistrates, the citizens of Western nations find themselves torn by conflicting duties and become hypocrites. The moral principles of Tahitians, by contrast, spring from their nature and are in harmony with it; unencumbered by religious or civil codes of conduct, their obligations and inclinations are the same.

The work's full title speaks of the inappropriateness of moral ideas to physical actions that do not accord with them – in effect, the unsuitability of Christian morality to sexual intercourse. Whereas Rousseau believed that the injunctions of morality characteristically clashed with the promptings of nature, Diderot imagined that the example of Tahiti showed how the gulf between nature and morality might be bridged. As the dialogue nears its conclusion Orou makes it plain that the sexual freedom enjoyed by his countrymen has a social purpose – that is, to increase the population, and thereby the prosperity and strength of the island, for theirs is the home not of *Vénus gaulante* but of *Vénus féconde*. When Thia throws her arms around the chaplain she implores him to inseminate her so that she may proudly bear her first child. Orou confides that the seed extracted from the flesh of Bougainville's sailors was a clever tribute more valuable than

the greatest treasure. Dissolute old women who engage in fruitless sexual intercourse, are, by contrast, punished, even enslaved. If the Tahitians are exuberantly impulsive they are also shown to be capable of purpose, even schemes, for in keeping to the natural order of things their whole society is designed to promote the general welfare. As Orou remarks, it follows the 'laws of Nature', whose 'eternal will is that good should be preferred to evil and the general good to the particular' (p. 52). The precepts of Bougainville's Christians, however, both repress nature and obstruct public utility. Kept from temptation by their holy orders, God's ministers impoverish not only themselves but the world; in Tahiti their sinister counsel of abstinence has made girls blush and boys hesitate, doubting the joyous nobility of their sentiments and endangering the procreation of offspring. In no other text are the elements of Diderot's irreverent, sensuous, liberal, anticolonial, utilitarian philosophy drawn together more closely.

The Observations sur le Nakaz

After his contract for the *Encyclopédie* came to an end Diderot was supported by Catherine II, Empress of Russia. He sold her his library and in return was provided with a pension for the rest of his life. In 1773, at her invitation, he travelled to St Petersburg, the only journey he ever made outside France, and this visit led to three substantial works – the *Mémoires pour Catherine II*, a record of his part of the discussions he had with the Empress; the *Plan d'une Université*, a scheme for educational reform in which mathematical and scientific studies came before literary and philosophical subjects; and the *Observations sur le Nakaz*, an extensive commentary on Catherine's proposed reforms which he began writing on his journey home and then revised at intervals over the next few years.

Catherine was German-born, French-educated, and Russian only by marriage; her husband was a grandson of Peter the Great. Soon after he came to the throne in 1762 as Peter III, he died in mysterious circumstances (Catherine herself was suspected of ordering his murder), and she assumed power. Her aim was to continue the process of Westernisation which Peter the Great had begun in the early years of the century. By a series of fundamental reforms, affecting all aspects of Russian life, Peter had tried to lift his country out of

political isolation, economic backwardness and the unthinking acceptance of traditional values. He had curbed the influence of the Russian Orthodox Church, introduced a system of secular state education, encouraged trade and industry, and done all he could to make Russia like a Western European state. Catherine's desire to continue this policy led her to make contact with several leading figures of the French Enlightenment. She corresponded with Voltaire, she tried to persuade d'Alembert to become a tutor to her son and heir, and she became Diderot's benefactress.

In 1767 Catherine had summoned a Commission to draw up a wide-ranging code of laws for Russia; at the same time she published a *Nakaz* (literally, an Instruction) to serve as the basis for its discussions. This took the form of a long list of articles, combining general principles and specific proposals taken mostly from the writings of Montesquieu and Beccaria, but also drawing on Grotius, Pufendorf, the *Encyclopédie*, and the German cameralists Bielfeld and Justi. Following Montesquieu, the *Nakaz* insisted not only on the need for Russian laws to be made appropriate to Russian circumstances, but also on the political and military role of the nobility; following Beccaria, it advocated clarity in the formulation of laws and humane methods of executing them; like the German writers, it gave a significant place to bureaucracy and emphasised duties rather than rights.

The Commission sat for over a year but was then suspended, and the *Nakaz* was never used as a basis for legislation. Nor was its spirit observed. Catherine's foreign policy was no less aggressive and her domestic policy no less autocratic than those of her predecessors; in the course of her reign the condition of Russian serfs was made markedly worse by laws favouring the nobility. Yet the *Nakaz* remained her official policy, and as such it gave Diderot an opportunity to assess her rule and reflect on a number of political issues which had come increasingly to occupy his attention.

His *Observations* follow the arrangement of the *Nakaz* and, broadly speaking, fall into three main sections: articles I-XXX deal with matters of principle and organisation; articles XXXI-LXV with the legal system; and articles LXVI-CIV and CXXX-CXLIV with economic issues. For Diderot, however, such divisions were never precise, so that within each section more general questions are frequently raised; and there is also a section, CV-CXXIX, dealing with additional topics, such

as primogeniture (CXVIII) or the general difficulty of achieving clarity in matters of government (CXXII). The overall result is a diffuse and uneven work, but one in which Diderot dealt more extensively than elsewhere with practical details of reform.

Articles I, II and III of the *Observations* form a preamble to his commentary and set out his basic principles: the sovereignty of the people, limited government, and the exclusion of the priesthood from political power. He then addresses the issue of the Westernisation of Russia. Following Montesquieu's assertion that laws should conform to the particular circumstances of a people, Catherine had declared that the Russian people were European (IV), that Peter's reforms had therefore been successful, and that her own proposals would follow the same course. This policy had become a matter of controversy since the publication of the *Contrat social* in 1762. Rousseau had attacked Peter's introduction of Western practices and ideas, maintaining that Russia should develop at its own pace and in its own way; in so doing he had implicitly criticised Voltaire's *Histoire de Charles XII* (1731) and other writings, which had praised Peter's reforms. Voltaire immediately took up the challenge and defended Peter in the second volume of his *Histoire de l'Empire de Russie sous Pierre le Grand* (1763) and in his *Dictionnaire philosophique* (1765). The argument initiated the Slavophile–Westernising debate which has continued to the present day.

Diderot's position on this issue was complex. Like Voltaire, he believed in the value to Russia of secular education (LI, CVI, CXLV), and he wanted to stimulate Russia's economic development. Only intellectual and material advance could alleviate poverty and other hardship and bring about what was coming to be called 'civilisation', a social condition distinguished by the enjoyment of refined pleasures and an esteem for the arts and sciences. Unlike Voltaire, however, Diderot did not think that such development could be achieved by despotic means. It was a basic principle for him that 'all political speculation should be subordinated to the laws of nature' (CXXXI), which in this case meant that political and social change must accord with the pace of Russia's own evolution. To impose radical change from above, as Peter had done, was (in Voltaire's words) to force nature, and that seemed to Diderot disastrous. The natural course of economic progress, in his view, must take its impulse from below, from the activity of those working on the land and in small-scale industry. For this reason, he

wanted to give as much encouragement as possible to a Russian third estate (LI) and, like Rousseau, he was therefore also in favour of the emancipation of the serfs (LI, LXXV, LXXVII, LXXX, CXLV). While the cause of political liberty could be helped by settling European colonists in Russia (IV, LI) – a policy which Catherine herself had begun – the only sure way towards social advance was to organise the country, legally and economically, in conformity with the basic principles of liberty and property (LX, LXXIII, LXXVIII, XCI, CXXV, CXLV). By liberty, Diderot meant a natural right which in society was regulated by law (see p. 186); by property, he meant the legal right to own land and other possessions (see pp. 179–80).

The subject of Westernisation raises two issues, one political and the other economic, which concern Diderot most in this work: the question of despotism and the philosophy of the physiocrats. In 1770, three years before Diderot's visit to Russia, France had experienced a political crisis when the Parlement of Paris had been exiled and dissolved after its refusal to register an edict for tax reform. Similar confrontations with the Crown had occurred earlier in the century, but none had had a comparable impact. The only institution supposed to provide a countervailing force to the king's power was shown to be, in the last resort, completely ineffectual, and the monarchy was seen as being close to an Oriental despotism. This experience affected Diderot profoundly, as is clear from the *Observations* (xv, xvii). Catherine suggested a political arrangement similar to that in France, where all power would effectively be in the hands of the monarch, but with intermediary bodies acting as a trustee (*le corps dépositaire*) of the laws; they would examine the monarch's proposals for legislation and could make representations if they disagreed with them. Following Montesquieu, she maintained that the large size of the empire made it necessary for her power to be absolute. However, the emphasis which Montesquieu had placed on the need to divide power and limit authority was notably absent from the *Nakaz*; the intermediary bodies were dependent on the sovereign (xi, xiii), and what Catherine called absolute monarchy Montesquieu himself had described as despotism. Diderot repeatedly points out the despotic character of Catherine's rule; his first and last comments address this issue, and the work contains a notable attack (which he reiterated and expanded in the *Histoire des Deux Indes* (see pp. 207–9)) on the idea of an enlightened despot (vii).

But how was monarchical power to be checked? Diderot constantly returns to this question. He suggests that there should be, first, a constitutional framework in which the sovereign recognised that her authority derived its legitimacy from popular consent (I, IX) and that her power was subject to precise limits (I, VI, VII); second, an independent intermediary body, similar to the English Parliament but not as liable to corruption (VIII, XII, XIII, XXII); and third, a large number of social reforms, including a system of national education which would instil the rights and duties of the population (XIII, LIV, LV), freedom of expression (CXXII), the eradication of privilege (XLII, CIX), equality before the law (XX, LXXIII), a fair distribution of taxes (LXXVIII, LXXXVII), and the emancipation of the serfs. This was a great deal to expect, and it is clear that Diderot was not optimistic for the future, partly because of the circumstances in Russia and Catherine's character, and also because he had become increasingly sceptical about the power of ideas to influence events (XII, LXIX, LXXIV).

On the question of economic progress Diderot took issue with the physiocrats – Quesnay, Mirabeau, Le Mercier de la Rivière – who had developed a systematic analysis of the way in which economies function, based on what they believed to be objective laws of nature. The most important of these laws were that only agricultural surplus produces a real increase in wealth, and that free trade (*laissez-faire*) was essential to agricultural prosperity. They were hostile to any measures which favoured industry or trade at the expense of agriculture, since in their view these would lead to luxury, and thus to economic imbalance and moral decay. They believed that their laws had the same universal application as Euclidean geometry, that they would therefore be accepted by all thinking people, and that they could accordingly be implemented with autocratic efficiency.

Diderot had for a time been an enthusiastic supporter of the physiocrats, but the combination of famine and rioting which occurred in France in 1770 after restrictions on the grain trade had been lifted, together with a devastating attack on physiocratic ideas – the *Dialogues sur le commerce des blés* (1770) by his friend the abbé Galiani – led him to change his mind. Those ideas had appealed to him in large part because they were formulated in terms of laws of nature. But Diderot now saw that there was a crucial disagreement between himself and the physiocrats about the character of nature: for

them it was static, but for him it was subject to change (xii). While he recognised that agriculture was fundamental to economic well-being (LXXXII, CXI, CXLV), he regarded manufacturing as equally important (LXXXIX) and trade as highly desirable (xcvii). He therefore refused to accept that luxury was necessarily harmful (LXXIII, LXXXVII, CXXX). Like the physiocrats he wanted to see the abolition of guilds (CXVI), a policy of free trade (CXXXV), and the general adoption of the two principles of liberty and property; but he thought that political realities were not as simple as they maintained (xix). He disagreed with their claim that merely by circulating the 'evidence' of their ideas they would win government approval and so bring about the implementation of their policies (xii).

The physiocrats' confidence in the power of 'evidence' was similar to the belief in the value of criticism and rational debate which Diderot himself had shown in his article 'Encyclopédie', but which, in the light of experience over the intervening years, he had come to doubt. The realities of power and self-interest stood in the way of change; the extent of enlightenment was slight, and those who were enlightened were ineffectual (xii). It was true that the physiocrats themselves had influenced economic policy by propagating their ideas. Increasingly, however, Diderot came to be aware of how many obstacles to reform there can be, and how large a part is played by the circumstances in which debate occurs. He never lost his commitment to speak out against error and injustice, but he no longer expected that argument or protest was enough to bring about change.

Diderot revised his *Observations* in Paris in 1775, at a time when it was believed that Catherine was about to resume the legislative task she had begun with the publication of the *Nakaz*. When he did so he had before him another commentary on the work (recently rediscovered in St Petersburg) by the physiocrat G.F. Le Trosne. In the course of his revision Diderot made a point of addressing some of these comments, although Catherine herself had never been impressed by physiocratic ideas and they are of little relevance to the *Nakaz* itself. What this suggests is that Diderot may have intended his *Observations* for a wider audience, for the issues of free trade, luxury and physiocracy were then as much at the centre of political discussion in France as was the question of despotism. In the event, however, he neither published nor circulated the work, apart from some passages which he included in the *Histoire des Deux Indes*. On his

death the text was sent to Catherine with his other manuscripts, and it was only published in 1920.

The *Histoire des Deux Indes*

One of the most popular works in Europe during the 1780s was the abbé Raynal's *Histoire philosophique et politique des établissements et du commerce des Européens dans les deux Indes* (generally known as the *Histoire des Deux Indes*), a wide-ranging history of European colonisation. The first edition (dated 1770) appeared in 1772, a second longer edition in 1774, and a third still larger edition, which was frequently reprinted, in 1780. By 1790 at least thirty editions had been published, as well as a further twenty-five editions of extracts and epitomes. Although Raynal was the credited author, much of the text was written by others, and many of the most notable passages were by Diderot. The identification of these contributions over the past twenty-five years has greatly increased our knowledge of Diderot's social and political thought in the last years of his life.

The *Histoire* set out to be an extended panegyric on the value of commerce and seems to have originated from a desire to rethink French colonial policy after the losses of the Seven Years War. It was organised around the achievements of individual European countries – describing their situation before colonial expansion, the process of colonisation and then its effects on the colonies and on Europe – first in relation to the East Indies and then to the West Indies. In the process it became almost a world history from a European perspective, covering a vast range both geographically and historically. At the same time it contained many passages reflecting on the events described, and taking a strong moral position on the issues they raised. For this reason the history was called philosophical as well as political. It was the moral aspect, above all, which made the book so popular, for the narrative was interspersed with impassioned attacks on tyranny and slavery. The frontispiece of the 1780 edition portrayed Raynal as the 'Defender of Humanity, Truth and Freedom', above a tableau which included an overturned throne, the liberation of slaves and the figure of Liberty.

Behind Raynal, in this frontispiece, were volumes of the *Encyclopédie*, for the *Histoire* was similar to Diderot's earlier enterprise, both in its ideals and its collaborative character. But its tone is

quite different. Where the earlier work welcomed change and was inspired by a sense of confidence in the future, the *Histoire* conveys a sense of frustration and crisis. While it praises commerce, it also expresses alarm at the effects of greed and excessive wealth; while it records the progress of freedom in some places, at certain historical moments, it also shows despair at the political corruption and stagnation that then seemed to grip most of Europe. At the same time, however, the vehemence of its protests against this situation and its assertions of the claims of liberty against oppression give the work a radical flavour.

Diderot's contributions reflect a general sense of crisis. Under the cover of anonymity he was able to express his hostility to despotism with a rhetorical force unmatched in previous writings, but the prevailing situation in France, together with the fact of his own approaching old age, gave a sombre tone to much of his text. There is a recurring preoccupation with violence and bloodshed, sometimes as a necessary stage on the way towards renewal (12, 15, 16, 17), sometimes as the inescapable fate of those whose predicament is hopeless (2, 21). The mood seems to alternate between occasional optimism and an oppressive pessimism. At times Diderot insists that, since everything has its limit, despotism will not endure (4), as the American Revolution appeared to demonstrate (23). Elsewhere he states that freedom is always short-lived (24), and that in every society, whatever its form of government, hostility between its members is endemic (21). The behaviour of Europeans in their colonies (6, 7), the existence of slavery (14, 29), the savage violence of pirates (10), all add up to a terrible indictment of humanity. It therefore comes as no surprise to find him questioning whether civilised man can possibly be regarded as superior to primitive man (19).

The remarks he makes about renewal through bloodshed, his opposition to the notion of reform from above by enlightened despots (25), and his spirited defence of both the English Revolution of the previous century (16, 17) and the American Revolution of his own day (21-23), have sometimes given rise to the claim that in his later writings Diderot came to advocate a general right of revolution. There are a few indications (in his *Mémoires pour Catherine II*) that during his stay in Russia he did indeed approach such a position. But it is hard to find evidence for it in any subsequent text, and that was not his view in the *Histoire des Deux Indes*. He maintains there that

people have a right to resist tyranny and a right to change their government, using arguments drawn from Paine's *Common Sense* (21). He also asserts a right of tyrannicide (21), which had justified the assassination of Caesar (27) and the execution of Charles I (16). But that right was limited and circumscribed; it was not a principle justifying more radical change. Diderot was not in favour of 'the chimera of equality' (20); while all men must be equal before the law (see p. 124), and less economic inequality will mean a more peaceful society (see pp. 16-17), natural inequalities between individuals are unavoidable and should be recognised (21). Although he persistently argued for freedom of expression (11), Diderot appears to have had little faith in more formal aspects of democracy. Political change should always be gradual and take account of 'the general will' (26), but from his description here and in the *Observations sur le Nakaz* (xiv), that seems more a matter of public opinion than of institutional procedures. As his address to Louis XVI indicates, Diderot envisaged only limited reforms in order to make the French monarchy constitutional (3); he never thought that any other type of government would prove suitable for a country as large as France. When he writes of the American Revolution as an inspiration for Englishmen (23), he does not mean that the English should aim to overthrow their monarch or political leaders. He means, rather, that they should be more vigilant in safeguarding their freedoms; if unsuccessful, they should not rise up in revolt but instead emigrate to the New World.

Behind this view lay a general historical perspective which became more important to Diderot in his last years, that is, the cyclical view of history. Everything has its historical limit, as he had stated in his article 'Encyclopédie' (see p. 24), and Europe, he observed in the *Supplément*, is 'near its old age' (see p. 40). It had therefore entered a period of irremediable political and social decline. It was because America was young that liberty could be realised there. Diderot was far from alone in holding this view, but for him it had a special significance. Among his contemporaries the case for cyclical change was usually based on historical evidence – the rise and fall of empires. For Diderot, however, it was less the facts of history than the model of biology which was central. Because his materialism was so comprehensive, and because he had such an acute awareness of the physicality of things, the notions of birth and decay were for him particularly vivid and decisive. For the same reason that much of his

fiction revolved around the transience of human feelings, above all sexual feelings, his historical reflections came to be increasingly concerned with 'the instability of which we are the witness and plaything' (18).

This element of Diderot's thought is especially clear in his synoptic account of the character of historical change, where he states that physical causes determine 'the periodic order of different governments', all following 'a regular circle of prosperity and misfortune, liberty and slavery, morality and corruption' (24). What is perhaps most notable about this passage is its resolutely non-humanistic perspective. Beneath all the endeavours of mankind is the rhythm of nature, which sets inescapable limits to what men can achieve; there is no uninterrupted progress and the future will always be uncertain. Diderot here began to elaborate a philosophy of history quite distinct from those then being formulated by German or Scottish thinkers. Herder and Kant also assimilated history to nature, but for them nature was essentially benign and in the long term favourable to humanity. To Ferguson or Smith, on the other hand, the development of civilisation was characterised by man's growing independence from nature, since the decisive factors in historical change were those economic and social arrangements which men make for themselves. In their different ways both these philosophies of history were progressive and gave man an exalted role. Diderot's view was different: for him the laws of nature remained paramount but those laws were not benign, in the sense of promoting human progress.

This did not mean, however, that he was any less concerned with contemporary affairs. 'Every writer of genius is born magistrate of his country', he observed (27), a view which was becoming increasingly widespread at this time. Voltaire and Rousseau had both shown how a writer's isolation or marginality could be turned to powerful effect upon society, and by the 1770s this role was being applied more immediately to politics. What a writer could achieve of course depended on prevailing circumstances. In young America Tom Paine's *Common Sense* had had a decisive impact; in aged France such possibilities did not exist. Nevertheless, the writer still had a duty to speak out, and to prepare – 'perhaps from afar' – the improvement of man's lot (29).

Diderot's sense of this duty did not end with his contributions to the *Histoire des Deux Indes*. His final work was a commentary on the

life and writings of Seneca: a first edition was published in 1778, and a second, longer version, the *Essai sur les règnes de Claude et de Néron*, in 1782. Like Seneca, Diderot had had an uneasily close relation to an unscrupulous ruler; although he had seen that Catherine II was a despot he had continued to receive favours from her. But just as Nero was not the only Roman tyrant, so Catherine was not the only living despot, and parallels between imperial Rome and contemporary France were not hard to see. In the *Essai* Diderot remarked on this parallel, he spoke out against tyranny, and he applauded the victory of the American colonists for giving a lesson to those in authority about the legitimate exercise of power. 'What use is philosophy if it is silent?' he asked. 'You must either speak out, or renounce the title of teacher of the human race.' For Diderot himself these words had a certain poignancy, since he had spoken out (especially in the *Histoire des Deux Indes*), but rarely in his own name. The *Essai* became an exception. His health was now beginning to fail, he realised that this would be his last work, and so he put his name on the title page. In Paris, two years after the second edition was published, he died.

The Central Themes of Diderot's Political Thought

It has often been remarked that Diderot elaborated no systematic or original political philosophy. Throughout his literary career he put forward his views largely by way of commentary on the ideas of others, and even his *Encyclopédie* article 'Eclectisme' – in which he defines an eclectic as a 'philosopher who dares to think for himself' – merely recapitulates Brucker, in turn a disciple of Pufendorf, who was scarcely a revolutionary thinker himself. We must not conclude from Diderot's many intellectual debts, however, that he lacked a coherent doctrine of his own. He perceived the world as in continual flux, and his verve and skill in the use of dialogue illustrate his sense that only a constantly shifting perspective could do justice to the vicissitudes of real experience. The *Neveu de Rameau*, his greatest work and one of the masterpieces of the eighteenth century, portrays an unresolved clash of ideals and personalities in the same way that Diderot also saw as characteristic of political life. He was determined to describe men's behaviour in its diverse and contrasting forms and showed little patience for metaphysical abstractions about human nature in

general. Together with d'Alembert and other contemporary thinkers, he was convinced that the *esprit de système* of seventeenth-century philosophy must be supplanted by a more empirical *esprit systématique*.

Such attitudes were inspired both by Diderot's materialism – that is, his conviction that there was no intangible spirit or soul which motivated the behaviour of human beings – and his atheism – that is, his denial of the existence of a transcendent or immanent God. Other Enlightenment thinkers who wished to establish a science of man were drawn to Newtonian physics, and to mechanistic models of human nature, in opposition to the Cartesian distinction between mind and matter. Diderot, however, objected to the doctrine that matter was essentially inert and that its motion was determined by external forces subject to mathematical laws. For him, matter was inherently active and self-animating, and in his writings on organic nature he tried to trace its vital source, sometimes to a seminal fluid, or to the fermentation of an atom, or to the attribute of sensitivity (*sensibilité*). In order to understand how matter functioned, he placed more emphasis on the study of chemistry, biology and physiology, than on physics. He took a great interest in medicine, and he was much influenced by the speculations of La Mettrie and Maupertuis; by the researches of the Montpellier school of doctors, notably Bordeu (who figures as a character in his *Rêve de d'Alembert*); and by the ideas of the Swiss biologist, Haller. He also drew lasting inspiration from Lucretius' *De rerum natura* and from the Epicurean notion that all life is in a continual state of change.

This dynamic and organic materialism, according to which man is a product of restless nature, gives rise to a number of principles which illuminate Diderot's moral and political theory. One of these is that civilisations are like organic forms generated in nature's flux, passing through periodic stages of growth, maturity and decline. Natural forces impel men to come together or to disperse in different parts of the world, he remarks in the *Histoire des Deux Indes*, and through the circle of revolutions the law of nature wills that, without exception, empires should be born and die (see pp. 206–7). A second principle is that our biological attributes make the establishment of society both necessary and possible, and with it the development of institutions through which our nature may be improved. Our impulses of reproduction and self-preservation create bonds of attraction and not a condition of war, Diderot claims (pp. 205–6), showing in his article

'Droit naturel' that a regard for the welfare of others is a characteristically human trait (p. 20), underpinning the contractual formation of legitimate civil authority. A third principle is that the moral rules which dictate human conduct in society promote the general interest only if they accord with, and do not suppress, the physical desires and natural tendencies of men and women. 'How brief would be the codes of nations, if only they conformed . . . to . . . nature!', he exclaims in the *Supplément au Voyage de Bougainville* (p. 71). 'How many vices and errors would man have been spared!' A fourth principle is that political institutions must correspond to local circumstances and the natural temperament and level of development of a population. The influence of climate will have a permanent effect upon laws, arts, indeed everything, he remarks in the *Observations sur le Nakaz* (xxiv). The only way to encourage the growth of population is to make the people happy. Hence, 'do not govern too much' (LXXVIII). In different ways these themes of organic growth and adaptability inform all the works presented here. They lend weight to Diderot's account of the sequential march of the human spirit over generations, in the article 'Encyclopédie'; to his conjunction of sexual pleasure with the promotion of public utility, in the *Supplément*; to his critique of physiocracy which threatens to prove a 'philosophy contrary to man's nature', in the *Observations* (LXXIII); and to his contention that men were never isolated but always carried with them a seed of sociability, in the *Histoire* (24).

Some of these features of his social and political thought may be explained as a kind of inversion of the prevailing anthropology of the Enlightenment, according to which *l'homme moral* controls and is superior to *l'homme physique*. For as Diderot observes in the *Histoire* (24), the more one contemplates the physical and moral world, the more one becomes convinced that 'there is only one world, the physical, which directs everything when it is not opposed by fortuitous causes'. His reflections on this subject have much in common with the ideas of his friend and fellow-contributor to the *Encyclopédie*, d'Holbach, who, in several works published in the 1770s, claimed that man is a purely physical being and that *l'homme moral* is no more than *l'homme physique* considered from a certain perspective; both thinkers shared the belief that the best social organisations must be in equilibrium with nature's organic forces. But since he regarded the development of a corporate body out of its individual members as a

move towards increasing and unpredictable complexity, Diderot rejected the view that the study of politics could be reduced to the kind of analysis that was possible in either physics or physiology. He believed that ethics and politics must always be conjectural – a point he pursued with particular force against Helvétius, who had sought to lay their foundations as exact sciences. And since he always put stress upon the diversity of phenomena, and on the richness and particularity of details, he was more inclined to relativist interpretations of social behaviour than to any uniform or monolithic explanation.

In this regard for diversity; in his attention to the deep structural forces which give rise to the institutions of a state and imbue them with their character; in his account of the periodic growth and decline of civilisations, Diderot's political thought closely resembles that of Montesquieu. Both writers were centrally concerned with the ways in which man's organic nature and disparate physical factors may influence government, and perceived *l'homme moral* to be determined in his nature by *l'homme physique*. While Montesquieu may have placed greater emphasis on the influence of social customs and mores, and less on physical impulses, they each studied politics from below, as it were, and thereby disagreed with Rousseau's observation that men are everywhere what their governments make of them.

Yet these similarities do not give rise to a shared set of political principles. Whereas Montesquieu was committed to the dispersion of political power, with the different forces of government acting against one another, Diderot thought that it was the harmony between men's nature and their governments, and not a conflict within the institutions of politics itself, which best ensured their freedom. In all of the writings assembled here he puts a case for liberty in terms of the compatibility of civil laws and institutions with the temperament and dispositions of the people to which they apply. At the heart of his political thought lies his insistence that human nature must not be forced and that freedom should be encouraged by the adoption of rules which express men's fundamental tendencies. In this perspective his conception of liberty actually has affinities with Montesquieu's broadest definition of laws – that is, as the necessary relations which derive from the nature of things. The fact that Diderot could locate liberty where Montesquieu found laws no doubt has much to do with the dynamic character of his materialism, for to see nature as continually productive was to suppose that in the organic

world the malformations of living matter could be overcome. As nature changes, so too does politics. The best political systems, by allowing scope for the metamorphoses of man, appear to be those which arise from spontaneous generation.

Chronology

- 1713 Born in Langres, Burgundy
- 1715 Death of Louis XIV
- 1721 Montesquieu's *Lettres persanes*
- 1723 Accession of Louis XV
- c. 1728 Diderot moves to Paris
- 1734 Voltaire's *Lettres philosophiques*
- 1746 *Pensées philosophiques*, Diderot's first original work, condemned by Paris Parlement
- 1747 Diderot and d'Alembert appointed editors of *Encyclopédie*
- 1748 Montesquieu's *Esprit des lois*
- 1749 Publication of the *Lettre sur les aveugles*, leading to brief imprisonment
- 1751 Volume 1 of *Encyclopédie*
- 1755 Rousseau's *Discours sur l'inégalité*
- 1756–63 Seven Years War against England
- 1757 Assassination attempt on Louis XV
- 1758 Helvétius' *De l'esprit*
- 1759 Publication of *Encyclopédie* halted
- Voltaire's *Candide*
- 1762 Rousseau's *Contrat social* and *Emile*
- Diderot begins the *Neveu de Rameau*
- 1765 Final volume of text of *Encyclopédie*
- Catherine II becomes Diderot's benefactress
- Expulsion of Jesuits from France
- 1769 Composition of *Le Rêve de d'Alembert*
- 1770 D'Holbach's *Système de la nature*

Chronology

- 1771 Exile and dissolution of Paris Parlement
1772 Composition of *Supplément au Voyage de Bougainville*
Publication of first edition of *Histoire des Deux Indes*
1773-4 Visit to Russia
First draft of *Observations sur le Nakaz*
1774 Death of Louis XV, accession of Louis XVI
1778 Deaths of Voltaire and Rousseau
France enters American War of Independence
1780 Third edition of *Histoire des Deux Indes*, condemned by
Paris Parlement
1784 Death in Paris

Further reading

Abbreviations

- CD *Colloque International Diderot (1713-1784)*,
ed. A.-M. Chouillet (Paris 1985)
RDE *Recherches sur Diderot et l'Encyclopédie*
SVEC *Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century*

For general introductions to Diderot's life and thought, see especially Peter France's *Diderot* (Oxford 1983); Jacques Chouillet's *Diderot* (Paris 1977); and John Hope Mason's *The Irresistible Diderot* (London 1982), which also contains extensive extracts in translation. The best and most substantial intellectual biography is Arthur Wilson's *Diderot* (New York 1972). A good detailed chronology appears in Yves Benot's *Diderot: De l'athéisme à l'anticolonialisme* (Paris 1970). The first collected edition of Diderot's works based on the original manuscripts was that of Naigeon, in 15 volumes (Paris 1798). Until recently the best complete edition was by Jules Assézat and Maurice Tournoux, in 20 volumes (Paris 1875-77), which is cited in most of the Diderot scholarship over the past century. Useful selections can be found in the *Œuvres philosophiques* (Paris 1956), edited by Paul Vernière. The Assézat-Tournoux edition is now being superseded by the edition published by Hermann under the direction of Herbert Dieckmann, Jacques Proust and Jean Varloot (Paris 1975—), of which 20 volumes, of a projected 33, have so far appeared. Much the fullest list of the secondary literature is Frederick Spear's *Biblio-*

graphie de Diderot: Répertoire analytique (Geneva 1980), and vol. 2: 1976-1986 (Geneva 1988).

No comprehensive account of Diderot's political thought is available, although there are notable discussions by Vernière in his edition of the *Œuvres politiques* (Paris 1963); Yves Benot in his edition of the *Textes politiques* (Paris 1960) and in *Diderot: De l'athéisme à l'anti-colonialisme*; Anthony Strugnell in *Diderot's Politics* (The Hague 1973); and Wilson in 'The development and scope of Diderot's political thought', in *SVEC* 27 (1963), pp. 1871-1900.

The fullest discussions of Diderot's contributions to the *Encyclopédie* and contemporary reactions to his work are by John Lough in his *Essays on the 'Encyclopédie' of Diderot and d'Alembert* (London 1968) and Jacques Proust in his *Diderot et l'Encyclopédie* (Paris 1962, 2nd edn 1967). See also Douglas Gordon and Norman Torrey, *The Censoring of Diderot's 'Encyclopédie' and the Re-established Text* (New York 1947); Lough, *The 'Encyclopédie'* (London 1971); Proust, *L'Encyclopédie* (Paris 1962), and chs. 10, 11, 13, 18 and 27 of Wilson's *Diderot*. For further treatments of specific themes in Diderot's political contributions, see Robert Loyalty Cru, *Diderot as a Disciple of English Thought* (New York 1913); René Hubert, *Les sciences sociales dans l'Encyclopédie* (Paris 1923); Proust, 'La contribution de Diderot à l'Encyclopédie et les théories du droit naturel', *Annales historiques de la Révolution française* 35 (1963), pp. 257-86; Leland Thielemann, 'Diderot and Hobbes', *Diderot Studies* 2 (1952), pp. 221-78; and Robert Wokler, 'The influence of Diderot on the political theory of Rousseau', in *SVEC* 132 (1975), pp. 55-111.

There have been three important critical editions of the *Supplément au Voyage de Bougainville*. Gilbert's Chinard's (Paris 1935), based on the St Petersburg manuscript, deals mainly with the context of eighteenth-century voyages and primitivism; Herbert Dieckmann's (Geneva 1955), based on the earliest surviving manuscript, is addressed principally to the work's composition and internal structure; and that of the Hermann edition in vol. XII of the *Œuvres complètes* (Paris 1989) offers a more accurate transcription of the St Petersburg manuscript and collates the text with passages in Diderot's other writings. Further notable discussions of the *Supplément* can be found in Michèle Duchet's *Anthropologie et histoire au siècle des lumières* (Paris 1971); Robert Mauzi's *L'idée du bonheur dans la littérature et la pensée*

françaises au XVIII^e siècle (Paris 1960); and Raymond Trousson's *Voyages aux pays de nulle part* (Brussels 1975). See also Dena Goodman, 'The structure of political argument in Diderot's *Supplément au voyage de Bougainville*', *Diderot Studies* 21 (1983), pp. 123-37; Ralph Leigh, 'Diderot's Tahiti', in *Studies in the Eighteenth Century*, 5, ed. J.P. Hardy and J.C. Eade (Oxford 1983), pp. 114-128; Luzian Okon, 'Nature' et 'civilisation' dans le '*Supplément au voyage de Bougainville*' de Denis Diderot (Frankfurt 1980); and the critical guide to the text by Peter Jimack (London 1988). The Polly Baker episode has been the subject of an extensive study by Max Hall, in his *Benjamin Franklin and Polly Baker, the History of a Literary Deception* (Chapel Hill 1960).

For discussions of the *Observations sur le Nakaz*, see especially Georges Dulac, 'Diderot, éditeur des Plans et statuts des établissements de Catherine II', in *Dix-huitième siècle* 16 (1984), pp. 323-44; Dulac, 'Diderot et la civilisation de la Russie' in *CD*, pp. 161-71; Dulac, 'Le discours politique de Petersbourg', in *RDE* 1 (1986), pp. 32-58; Dulac, 'Pour reconsidérer l'histoire des *Observations sur le Nakaz*', in *Éditer Diderot, SVEC* 254 (1988), pp. 467-514; Giauluggi Goggi, 'Diderot e la formazione di un terzo stato in Russia', in *Diderot: il politico, il filosofo, lo scrittore*, ed. A. Mango (Milan 1986), pp. 55-81; Tourneux, *Diderot et Catherine II* (Paris 1899); Vernière, 'Diderot et Catherine II', in *Diderot: il politico*, pp. 39-54, and Vernière's edition of the *Mémoires pour Catherine II* (Paris 1966). With respect to the eighteenth-century debate about modernisation in Russia, see also Carolyn Wilberger, 'Peter the Great: an eighteenth century hero of our time?', *SVEC* 96 (1972), 9-127, and Wilberger, *Voltaire's Russia: Window on the East*, *SVEC* 164 (1976).

On the *Histoire des Deux Indes*, see especially H. Wolpe, *Raynal et sa machine de guerre* (Paris 1956); William Womack, 'Eighteenth century themes in the *Histoire philosophique et politique des deux Indes* of Guillaume Raynal', *SVEC* 96 (1972), pp. 129-265; and the papers collected in *Lectures de Raynal: l'Histoire des Deux Indes en Europe et en Amérique au XVIII^e siècle*, ed. H.-J. Lüsebrink and M. Tietz, *SVEC* 286 (1991). On Diderot's contributions, see Chouillet, 'La politique de Diderot entre la société démocratique et l'état hiérarchisé', in *Diderot: il politico*, pp. 23-37; Duchet, 'Le *Supplément au voyage de Bougainville* et la collaboration de Diderot à l'*Histoire des Deux Indes*', *Cahiers de l'Association des études françaises* (1961), pp. 173-87; Duchet, *Diderot et l'Histoire des Deux Indes ou l'écriture fragmentaire* (Paris 1978); Goggi,

'Diderot et l'*Histoire des deux Indes*: riflessioni sulla storia', *Studi francesi* 76 (1982), pp. 32-43; Goggi, 'L'ultimo Diderot e la prima rivoluzione inglese', in *Studi settecenteschi* 7/8 (1985/6), pp. 349-92; Goggi, 'Diderot et Médée dépeçant le vieil Eson', in *CD*, pp. 173-83; Goggi, 'Les fragments politiques de 1772', in *Editer Diderot, SVEC* 254 (1988), pp. 427-62; Lüsebrink, 'Zur Verhüllung und sukzessiven Aufdeckung der Autorschaft Diderots an der *Histoire des Deux Indes*', in *Denis Diderot*, ed. T. Heydenreich and H. Hudde (Erlanger Forschungen, Series A, vol. 34, 1984), pp. 107-26; and Strugnell, 'La voix du sage dans l'*Histoire des Deux Indes*', in *Diderot: les dernières années*, ed. P. France and A. Strugnell (Edinburgh 1985), pp. 30-42. On Diderot's last work, see Hope Mason, 'Portrait de l'auteur, accompagné d'un fantôme: l'*Essai sur les règnes de Claude et de Néron*', in *Diderot: les dernières années*, pp. 43-62.

Contents

<i>Foreword</i>	<i>page</i> vii
<i>Introduction</i>	ix
<i>Chronology</i>	xxxvi
<i>Further reading</i>	xxxviii
Articles from the <i>Encyclopédie</i>	i
The <i>Supplément au Voyage de Bougainville</i>	31
<i>Observations sur le Nakaz</i>	77
Extracts from the <i>Histoire des Deux Indes</i>	165
Index	215

Articles from the *Encyclopédie*

Editorial preface

The first volume of the *Encyclopédie* announced that Diderot was the author of the work's unsigned articles, and the editor of articles marked with an asterisk. The second volume, however, stated that unsigned articles could be by different authors, including persons who did not wish their identity to be known, while Diderot's asterisk was to prove scarce after the publication of volume VIII, and to vanish altogether after volume X. In the absence of surviving manuscript or other evidence, the correct attribution to their authors of *Encyclopédie* articles has therefore proved difficult and sometimes a matter for conjecture. Diderot seems to have been responsible for over 5,000 articles or editorial additions in all (many of just two or three lines), of which more than 3,000 appeared in the first two volumes alone. Even when their authorship is not in question, the originality of these contributions often remains doubtful, especially with regard to two subjects on which he wrote extensively: synonyms, for which he drew heavily on the work of the abbé Girard; and the history of philosophy, for which he relied largely on Brucker. Sometimes Diderot cited his source, merely adding a few comments of his own; sometimes he so modified the original text as to make a wholly novel point, not least by diverting his readers' attention to a second article, which informs the real sense of the first.

His editors have frequently ascribed to him political articles for the *Encyclopédie* which were known, or were later discovered, or for good reason are believed, to be by other authors. With the exception of 'Art' (which he expressly claimed as his own work) and 'Autorité politique' and 'Intolérance' (which we know to be his from other sources), all of the articles assembled here bear his asterisk; in no instance has any doubt been raised as to his authorship. Two of these articles, in particular, stand out from the rest in their importance: 'Autorité politique' and 'Droit naturel'. The first forms Diderot's most extensive treatment of his idea of

legitimate power in the state; the second provides his fullest account of natural justice. Having already been imprisoned in 1749 for his sacrilegious *Lettre sur les aveugles*, Diderot was especially alarmed by the extent of the theological opposition to 'Autorité politique'. When the Crown temporarily forbade further publication of the *Encyclopédie* following the appearance of volume II in 1752, he produced, with the *errata* for the first two volumes, a comment designed to placate his critics, in which he affirmed his belief that even the contractual authority of the people stems ultimately from God. His explanation of the article's original meaning is characteristically disingenuous, however, since as his source he refers to a passage from a text which he probably drew from the Paris Parlement's 1753 *Remontrances* against the despotic pretensions of King Louis XV. Publication of the article 'Droit naturel' excited less hostility from official circles, but it provoked a lengthy and critical reply from Rousseau – whose *Encyclopédie* article, 'Economie politique', cites it as a cross-reference – in a draft chapter of the work which was to become Rousseau's own main contribution to political thought, the *Contrat social*.

Our translations are from volumes v–vii of the Hermann edition of Diderot's *Œuvres complètes*, which are in turn drawn from the first edition of the *Encyclopédie*.



Encyclopédie

VOLUME I (1751)

ART [Diderot discusses the origin of the arts and sciences, the theoretical rules and practical applications of an art, the invidious effects of the distinction between liberal and mechanical arts, the general aim of the arts, the need to compile a treatise on the mechanical arts, the geometry and language of the arts, and the revolutionary impact upon scholarship, warfare and navigation due to the invention of printing, gunpowder and the compass, respectively.]

Let us at last give artisans their due. The *liberal arts* have spent enough time singing their own praises; they could now use what voice they have left to celebrate the *mechanical arts*. It is for the *liberal arts* to lift the *mechanical arts* from the contempt to which they have been so long relegated by prejudice; it is for the patronage of kings to protect them from the poverty in which they still languish. Artisans have regarded themselves as contemptible because they have been held in contempt; let us teach them to think better of themselves; it is the only way to obtain better products from them. Let a man pull himself away from the comfort of the academies and go down into the workshops, to collect information about the arts and set it out in a book which will persuade artisans to read, philosophers to think usefully, and the great to make at last some beneficial use of their authority and wealth . . .

We invite artisans for their part to take advice from scientists and not allow their discoveries to die with them. Let them know that to keep useful knowledge secret is to be guilty of a theft from society, and that it is no less base in these cases to put private interest before

the public interest than in a hundred others in which they would not hesitate to speak out. In becoming communicative their prejudices are cast off, above all that belief which they nearly all entertain that their art has reached the highest degree of perfection. Their lack of comprehension often leads them to attribute to the nature of things a fault which is only in themselves. Obstacles seem insuperable as long as they know no way of overcoming them. Let them conduct experiments; let everyone take part in the experiments; let the artisan contribute his manual skill, the academician his knowledge and advice, the rich man the cost of materials, time and trouble; and soon our arts and manufactures will possess all the supremacy we could wish over those of other peoples.

On the superiority of one workshop over another. But what makes for the superiority of one workshop over another is especially the excellence of the materials employed, the swiftness of the labour and the perfection of the product. The excellence of the materials is a matter for inspection. The swiftness of the labour and the perfection of the product depend entirely on the number of assembled workers. When a workshop is large, every operation is performed by a different man. Each worker undertakes and throughout his whole life will do only one particular thing; everyone does something different; from which it follows that every task is performed well and swiftly, and that the best manufactured product is the one made at least cost . . .

AUTORITÉ POLITIQUE No man has by nature been granted the right to command others. Liberty is a gift from heaven, and every member of the same species has the right to enjoy it as soon as he is in possession of reason. If nature has established any *authority*, it is that of paternal power; but paternal power has its limits, and in the state of nature it would end as soon as children were able to look after themselves. All other *authority* originates outside nature. On close examination, it can always be traced back to one of two sources: either the strength and violence of the person who has got hold of it, or the consent of those who have submitted themselves to it, by virtue of a contract, actual or presumed, with the person on whom they have conferred it.

Power acquired by violence is nothing but usurpation and lasts only as long as the person in command retains greater strength than those

who obey, so that if the latter become stronger in their turn and shake off the yoke they do so with as much right and justice as the person who imposed it on them. The same law that bestowed the *authority* thus takes it away: it is the law of the strongest.

Sometimes *authority* established by violence changes its nature, in effect when it endures and is maintained by the express consent of those who have been subjected to it. But in that case it comes under the second category I shall describe, and the person who had once seized it, in becoming a prince, ceases to be a tyrant.

The power which comes from the consent of the people necessarily presupposes conditions which makes its exercise legitimate, useful to society, advantageous to the republic, fixing and restraining it within limits. For a man neither should nor can submit himself entirely without reserve to another man, because he has one supreme master above all to whom he belongs completely. That is God, whose power over His creatures is always direct, who is a master as jealous as He is absolute, who never gives up His rights and never transfers them. For the common good and the maintenance of society, He permits men to establish an order of subordination amongst themselves and to only one of their own number; but He wishes this order to be reasonable and moderate, and not blind and unrestrained, so that no one arrogates the rights of the Creator. Any other form of submission constitutes the veritable crime of idolatry. To bend the knee before a man or a graven image is merely an external ritual for which God, who requires our hearts and minds, cares little. Such ritual He leaves to human fabrication, so that men may make use of it, howsoever they please, as the outward mark of a civil and political cult, or of a religion. It is thus not these ceremonies in themselves but the spirit in which they are established that makes their practice either innocent or criminal. An Englishman has no scruples about serving his king on bended knee; the ceremony signifies no more than what it is designed to do. But to yield up one's heart, mind and principles of conduct without reserve to the will and caprice of just another simple creature, to make him the sole and final motive for one's actions, is undoubtedly a crime of *lèse-majesté* against the Lord. If that were not so, the power of God, about which we hear so much, would be no more than an empty phrase that men would contrive to twist according to their fancy, and which the spirit of irreligion might trifle with in

turn, until all our ideas of power and subordination would become confused, with the prince flouting the authority of God, and subjects that of the prince.

True and legitimate power is thus necessarily limited. As Scripture informs us, 'Let your submission be reasonable'; *sit rationabile obsequium vestrum*.¹ 'All power that stems from God is an orderly power'; *omnis potestas a Deo ordinata est*.² For that is how we must understand these words, in conformity with right reason and their literal meaning, and not the interpretation that springs from contempt and flattery, according to which all power, of whatever kind, stems from God. Well, then, can there be no unjust powers? Are there no *authorities* which, instead of coming from God, conflict with His orders and oppose His will? Do usurpers have God on their side? Must we pay full allegiance to the persecutors of true faith? . . .

It is from his subjects themselves that the prince derives the *authority* he exercises over them, and this *authority* is limited by the laws of nature and of the state. Maintenance of the laws of nature and of the state are the conditions according to which subjects have submitted themselves, or are deemed to have submitted themselves, to the prince's rule. One of these conditions stipulates that since he has no power or *authority* over them except by their choice and consent, he may never employ his *authority* to breach the act or contract by which it was conferred on him;³ that would be to act in opposition to himself, since his *authority* can only subsist by virtue of the title which established it. What annuls the one cancels the other. The prince thus cannot dispose of his power or his subjects without the consent of the nation, or independently of the terms stipulated in the contract of submission. If he were to act otherwise, all would be null and void, and the laws would disengage him from any promises and vows he might have made, as in the case of a minor who has acted in ignorance, claiming a right to dispose of something which was his only in trust, substituting an absolute title for his merely conditional power.

The *authority* of government, moreover, while hereditary in one

¹ See Romans 12:1.

² See Romans 13:1.

³ In his *Suite de l'Apologie de l'abbé de Prades* Diderot cites the preceding lines from this paragraph in renewed defence of the thesis that civil society is established by contract, which parliaments have a sacred obligation to respect.

family and placed in the hands of one person, is not a piece of private property but a public good, which consequently can never be taken away from the people, to whom alone full ownership of it essentially belongs. Only the people, therefore, can issue a lease upon its use; they must always take part in any contract which awards the right to exercise it. The state does not belong to the prince, but the prince to the state, though it is for the prince to govern within the state, because the state has chosen him for that task, because he has put himself under an obligation to the people to administer their affairs, and because they, on their side, have undertaken to obey him in conformity with the laws. He who wears the crown may renounce it absolutely if he so wishes, but he may not place it upon the head of another without the consent of the nation which placed it on his. In a word, the Crown, the power of government and public *authority* are all goods of which the nation is proprietor, and of which princes have the usufruct, as its ministers and trustees. Although they are heads of state, they are none the less also members of it, the first members, to be sure, the most venerable and the most powerful, able to do all that is necessary to govern, but unable to act in any legitimate way to change the established government, nor to put another head of state in their place. The sceptre of Louis XV passes of necessity to his eldest son, and there is no power which can oppose this – neither that of the nation, because it is a condition of the contract, nor that of the child's father, for the same reason.

Authority may sometimes be entrusted for a limited period, as in the Roman Republic. It may be conferred for the lifetime of a single man, as in Poland; occasionally for the lifespan of one family, as in England; sometimes for so long as the male line of a family survives, as in France.

This deposition is occasionally entrusted to a particular rank in society; sometimes to several persons selected from all ranks, sometimes to one rank alone.

The conditions of this pact are different in different states. But everywhere the nation has the right to maintain the contract it has made against all opposition; no power may change it; and when it is no longer in force, the nation recovers the right and complete freedom to enter into a new contract with whom and however it pleases. That is what would happen in France if, by the greatest misfortune, the entire ruling family were to die out to the last of its

descendants; the sceptre and the Crown would then return to the nation.

Only slaves with minds as narrow as their hearts are vile could think otherwise . . .

The observance of laws, the preservation of liberty and the love of one's country are the fertile sources of all great things and all fine actions. In them can be found the happiness of peoples and the true renown of the princes who govern them. In pursuit of them, obedience is glorious and authority magnificent. On the other hand, flattery, self-interest and a servile mentality give rise to all the evils which overcome a state and the decrepitude which dishonours it. Where they prevail, subjects are wretched and princes hated. With them the monarch never hears himself proclaimed 'beloved'; with them submission is shameful, domination cruel. If I consider France and Turkey together from this point of view, I perceive, on the one hand, a society of men united by reason, inspired by virtue, and governed in accordance with the laws of justice by a leader equally wise and glorious; and, on the other hand, a herd of animals joined only by habit, prodded by the law of the stick, and led by an absolute master according to his whim.

[In support of these claims, Diderot proceeds to cite the authority of King Henri IV, 'one of our greatest kings', in an opening address to the Assembly of Notables in 1596, and, two years later, in exhortations to the bishops and the Parlement of Paris, following the proclamation of the Edict of Nantes. Diderot's citations are drawn from the first volume of Sully's *Mémoires*.]

That is how a monarch should address his subjects when he clearly has justice on his side; and why may he not do what every man can do when equity is on his side? As for his subjects, the first law which religion, reason and nature prescribe to them is to respect the terms of the contract they have made; never to lose sight of the nature of their government; in France, never to forget that so long as the reigning family continues in the male line, they must honour and stand in awe of their master, as the agent through whom they have willed that the image of God should be displayed and made visible on earth; to subscribe to these sentiments in recognition of the tranquillity and benefits which they enjoy on account of the security afforded to them by royalty; to invoke only one remedy against the misfortune, if it should ever befall them, of suffering an unjust, ambitious and

violent king – that is, of calming him by their submission and assuaging God by their prayers; for this is the only legitimate redress, in consequence of the pact of submission sworn of old to the prince regent, and to his descendants in the male line, whoever they may be; and to reflect that all the justifications one imagines for resisting are, on close inspection, only subtly coloured pretexts for disloyalty; and that through such conduct no one ever reformed a prince or abolished taxes but instead only added a new degree of misery to the misfortunes of which he complained already. Such are the foundations upon which peoples and those who govern them may ensure their reciprocal happiness.

VOLUME III (1753), ERRATA FOR THE FIRST TWO VOLUMES

To be added at the end of the article, 'Autorité': The English work from which it is claimed this article was drawn,⁴ was never read, nor seen by the author, nor known to him. It would, moreover, be useful to explain our meaning. We never claimed that the authority of princes did not come from God, but only wished to distinguish it from that of usurpers who took it away from legitimate princes, whom the people are always obliged to obey, even if they disgrace their rule, because the authority of legitimate princes comes from God, and that of usurpers is an evil which He permits. The evidence of God's gift of authority is the consent of peoples, and such irrevocable consent bestowed by the Crown to Hugh Capet and his descendants. In our article 'Autorité', in short, we only sought to comment upon and elaborate this passage, taken from a work, printed on the instruction of Louis XIV, which bears the title, *Treatise on the rights of the Queen over the different states of the monarchy of Spain* . . . 'The fundamental law of the state forms a reciprocal and eternal bond between the prince and his descendants, on the one hand, and the subjects and their progeny, on the other, by a sort of contract which ordains the

⁴ In the March 1752 issue of the *Journal de Trévoux* (p. 458), Father Guillaume-François Berthier had mistakenly suggested that the subversive ideas expressed in the article 'Autorité politique' were drawn from an anonymous work published in London in 1709, under the title *The Judgement of Whole Kingdoms and Nations Concerning the Rights, Powers and Prerogatives of Kings and the Rights, Privileges and Properties of the People*, translated into French under the title *Traité du pouvoir des Rois de la Grande-Bretagne* (Amsterdam 1714).

sovereign to reign and peoples to obey . . . a solemn engagement according to which they give themselves to each other for mutual assistance.¹⁵

VOLUME III

CITÉ The first of the major associations of large families, in which expressions of will and the use of force are entrusted to one corporate body or moral being, for reasons of security, internal and external safety, and all the other advantages of life . . . The corporate body or moral being entrusted with will and force is said to *command*: the persons who have ceded their will and force are said to *obey*. The concept of *city* thus assumes a connection between a corporate body or moral being with a unique will and physical beings, private individuals, who no longer have a will. Every city has two sources, one philosophical, the other historical. With regard to the first of these sources, it is maintained by some that man is naturally inclined to form *cities* or civil societies, that families tend to assemble with one another, that is, to confer their strength and will on a corporate body or moral being. This may be the case, but it is not easy to prove. Others deduce the *city* from the necessity of a civil society for the establishment and maintenance of the most basic communities, conjugal, paternal and seigneurial – clearly a false deduction, as is demonstrated by the example of patriarchs who live in families which are free and separate. There are some who have recourse either to the defects of human nature, or to its fear of harm, or to its passionate attraction to the comforts of life, or even to debauchery, in order to explain the assembly and survival of families in civil society. The first town or city was formed by Cain. Nimrod, who was evil, and who was one of the earliest men to assume sovereignty, was also a founder of *cities*. With their foundation and growth, we see the birth and increase of corruption and vice. History and philosophy are thus in accord as to the origin of *cities*. Whatever the laws of the *city* in which one resides, they must be known, observed and protected. In forming an

¹⁵ This quotation is most likely drawn from the *Remontrances du Parlement de Paris* of April 1753 (see *Les Remontrances du Parlement de Paris*, ed. J. Flammarion, Paris 1888–98, 3 vols., 1.522), although Diderot's source may have been a note to Jean Barbeyrac's French edition, under the title *Droit de la nature et des gens*, of Pufendorf's *De jure naturae et gentium*, vii.6.10. Barbeyrac's source, in turn, is a remark in Algernon Sidney's *Discourses concerning Government*.

impression of families as they come together to create a *city*, we conceive them to be equal. In forming an impression of their assembly, once their separate wills and force have been renounced, we conceive the subordination not only of families, but also of individuals. We must grasp the relation between *cities* in the same way. In forming an impression of *cities* that are isolated, we conceive them only to be equal; in forming an impression of their union, we conceive the establishment of empires and the subordination of *cities*, either amongst themselves, or to a corporate body or some moral being.

If only the same could be said of empires! But just for this reason there has been no association of empires at all, and absolute sovereigns remain equal, living alone and independently of one another in the state of nature. The consent which warrants the subordination to a corporate body or moral being, either of families that form a *city*, or of *cities* that comprise an empire, is evident from the facts; and whoever disturbs the order of families within the *city* is a bad citizen; whoever disturbs the order of *cities* within the empire is a bad subject; and whoever disturbs the order of empires in the world is a bad sovereign. In a well-governed state a *city* may be regarded as a single person, and that person as subject to an authority which resides in the physical form of an individual or in the moral being of a sovereign, whose task it is to attend to the good of *cities* in general and in particular.

The word *city* formerly referred to a state, a nation with all its dependencies, a specific republic. That meaning no longer applies today except to certain German cities and Swiss cantons.

Although the Gauls formed only one nation, they were nevertheless divided into different tribes, which Caesar termed *cities*, *civitates*. Each *city*, besides having its own assemblies, sent deputies as well to general assemblies, which addressed themselves to the interests of several districts. But the *city* or metropolis or capital in which the assembly met came above all others to be termed *civitas* . . .

Thereafter the word *city* came to apply only to episcopal towns, a terminology which scarcely survives anywhere apart from in England, where the word *city* only achieved currency after the Conquest; before that period all towns had been called boroughs . . . When a town grew over time, the term *city* was applied to the space which it had formerly occupied; in Paris there is thus the *city* and the university; in London the *city* and the suburbs; and in Prague and Cracow, where the town is

divided into three parts, the oldest is termed *city*. The word *city* is now hardly used by us except in this last sense; in all other contexts we speak of the *town* (*ville*), or *suburb* (*faubourg*), or *borough* (*bourg*) or *village*.⁶

CITOYEN A person who is a member of a free society comprised of several families, who partakes of the rights of that society and enjoys its privileges . . . A person who resides in such a society for a particular purpose, and who must depart from it once his business there is concluded, is not a *citizen* of that society but only a temporary subject. A person who makes his home there, but does not partake of its rights and privileges, is similarly not a *citizen*. Someone who has been deprived of the status ceases to be a *citizen*. Women, young children and servants are only granted the title as members of the family of a citizen properly so called; they are not true *citizens* themselves.

Citizens are of two kinds, *original* and *naturalised*. *Original citizens* are native-born. *Naturalised citizens* are those to whom society has granted the rights and privileges of participation, although they were not born in its midst.

Athenians were very cautious about according the title of *citizen* of their state to foreigners; they attached far more importance to it than did the Romans. The title of *citizen* was never debased among them, but neither did they make use of what would perhaps have been the greatest benefit of the esteem in which it was held, that is, of extending it to all who coveted the title. There were scarcely any citizens in Athens apart from those whose parents were themselves *citizens* . . .

It was nevertheless possible to become a *citizen* of Athens through adoption by a *citizen*, and with the consent of the people; but this privilege was not frequently extended . . .

In order to become a true Roman *citizen*, three things were necessary: to be domiciled in Rome, to be a member of one of the thirty-three tribes, and to be able to hold office in the Republic. Those who possessed certain rights of citizenship by concession and not birth, were only, properly speaking, honorary *citizens* . . .

The first privilege of a Roman *citizen* was to be liable only to the

⁶ Diderot of course means that the word *cité* has fallen into general disuse in the French language. In English, by contrast, it is the word *borough* which has come to seem archaic.

judgement of the people. The law of *Portia* prohibited putting a *citizen* to death. Even in the provinces he was not subject to the arbitrary power of a proconsul or praetor . . . At Rome, states M. de Montesquieu, in his book on *The Spirit of the Laws*, Book XI, ch. 19, as well as in Sparta, liberty for *citizens* and servitude for slaves were extremes. Yet despite the privileges, strength and grandeur of these *citizens* . . . it seems to me that the government of the Roman Republic was so composite that a less precise idea of citizenship prevailed there than in the canton of Zurich. To perceive that point clearly, one need only weigh carefully what is discussed in the rest of this article.

Hobbes draws no distinction between subject and *citizen*, correctly so, if one takes the strict meaning of the term *subject*, and the widest sense of the term *citizen*, and if one bears in mind that the latter term pertains only to the laws, while the former is defined in relation to a sovereign. *Citizens* and *subjects* are equally under command, but one by a moral, the other by a physical, force. The word *citizen* is appropriate neither to those who live in servitude nor to those who live in isolation; from which it follows that persons who, like sovereigns, live entirely in the state of nature, and others who, like slaves, have entirely renounced that state, can in no way be regarded as *citizens*; unless one maintains that there can be no reasonable society without an immutable moral being above the physical presence of the sovereign. Pufendorf, showing no regard to that exception, divided his study of duties into two parts, one on the duties of man, the other on the duties of the *citizen*.⁷

Since the laws of free societies of families are not the same everywhere, and since in most such societies there can be found an hierarchical order comprised of ranks, the *citizen* may still be regarded either in relation to the laws of his society, or in relation to the rank he occupies in the hierarchical order. In the second case, there will be a distinction between the magistrate *citizen* and the bourgeois *citizen*; in the first case between the *citizen* of Amsterdam and that of Basel.

Aristotle, in recognising the differences between civil societies and the order of citizens within each society, only acknowledged as real *citizens*, however, those who took part in the administration of justice

⁷ Diderot here refers to Pufendorf's *De officio hominis et civis*, which forms an abridgement of the much larger *De jure naturae et gentium*. The whole of this article follows the *De jure*, VII.2.20.

and who could look forward to passing from the status of commoners to the first ranks of the magistracy – a prospect possible only in pure democracies . . .

Pufendorf, in restricting the name of *citizen* to those who have established the state by a first assembly of families, and to their successors from father to son, introduced a frivolous distinction on which his work sheds little light and which can cause much confusion in a civil society. He differentiates original from naturalised *citizens*, through an ill-conceived idea of nobility. In their own societies, citizens, by virtue of their citizenship, are all equally noble – nobility stemming not from ancestry, but from the common entitlement to occupy the first ranks of the magistracy.

Since the moral being of the sovereign stands in the same relation to the *citizen* as a despotic corporate person with respect to the subject, and since even the most perfect slave does not give up the whole of his being to his sovereign, it must be all the more evident that the *citizen* retains certain rights of which he never divests himself. There are occasions when he finds himself pursuing the same path not merely of his fellow-citizens, but of the moral being which commands them all. That moral being has two dispositions, of which one is private and the other public: in its public face it must never confront resistance; in its private capacity it may suffer such resistance on the part of individuals and may even succumb to it. Because this moral being has estates and responsibilities, and tenancies and tenants, etc., we must, so to speak, distinguish the sovereign from the subject of sovereignty within it. It is thus on occasion both judge and advocate. That is undoubtedly a disadvantage; but it is a feature of all governments in general, and in itself this feature establishes no case either for or against government, except in terms of the frequency of its appearance. It is certainly true that subjects or *citizens* will be less likely to suffer injustice, the less frequently the physical or moral sovereign is both judge and advocate, on those occasions when it is attacked in its private capacity.

When there are disturbances the *citizen* will cling to the party in favour of the established order; when that order is dissolved, he will subscribe to the party of his city, if its judgement is unanimous; and if there is division in the city, he will embrace the party which advocates the equality of its members and the liberty of all.

The closer citizens approach an equality of aspirations and wealth,

the more tranquil will the state be: this appears to be an exclusive advantage of pure democracy, in comparison with all other forms of government. But even in the most perfect democracy, complete equality of a state's members is a chimera, and that is perhaps the cause of the dissolution of such a government, unless it is reformed by all the injustices of ostracism. With government in general, as with all animals, each step in life is a step towards death. The best government is not that which is immortal, but that which lasts longest and most peacefully.

VOLUME V (1755)

DROIT NATUREL This expression is used so frequently that there is scarcely anyone who is not convinced in his own mind that he knows just what it means. Such an inner conviction is common to the philosopher and the unreflective man alike. The sole difference between them is that in reply to the question, *What is right?*, the latter, bereft of any words and ideas, will refer you to the tribunal of conscience and remain mute, whereas the former will be reduced to silence and deeper reflection only after going round a vicious circle, which either brings him back to his point of departure or hurls him into the midst of another question scarcely less difficult to resolve than the one from which he imagined he had been freed by his definition.

The philosopher, when questioned, replies, *Right is the foundation or principal source of justice*. But what is justice? *It is the obligation to render to each person what is due to him.*⁸ But what is it that is due to one person rather than another in a world in which everything belongs to all, and in which the very idea of obligation would perhaps not yet exist? And what would be owed to others by a person who granted them everything and asked nothing of them? It is at this point that the philosopher begins to feel that the idea of *natural right* is, of all our moral concepts, one of the most important and most difficult to specify. We shall therefore be persuaded that we have accomplished much in this article if we succeed in establishing clearly certain principles in the light of which may be resolved the most substantial objections commonly raised against the idea of *natural right*. In order

⁸ See Plato's *Republic*, 431c-434e.

to achieve this, we must take up our discussion once more from the beginning and be mindful to put forward nothing which is not obvious, at least in terms of such evidence as moral questions can admit, and which a reasonable man would find satisfactory.

i. It is clear that if man is not free, or if his instantaneous decisions, or even his irresolution, spring from some material source external to his character, his choice could not be the pure expression of an immaterial substance and of a simple faculty of that substance. There could thus be neither calculated good nor calculated evil, though instinctual good and evil might exist; there could be no moral good or evil, no justice or injustice, neither obligation nor right. From which can be seen, we may add in passing, how important it is to establish firmly in our minds the reality not merely of free will but of liberty, which is only too often confused with free will. . .

ii. Our existence is mean, contentious, uneasy. We have passions and needs. We wish to be happy, and yet the unjust and impassioned man constantly feels impelled to do unto others what he would not wish them to do unto him. This is a judgement he proclaims in the depths of his soul, and from which he cannot escape. He sees his own nakedness and must either admit it to himself or accord to everyone else the same authority as he assumes.

iii. But what reproaches can we make to the man tormented by such violent passions that life itself becomes burdensome if he does not satisfy them and who, so as to win the right of disposing as he pleases of the existence of others, relinquishes to them the right over himself? What shall we reply to him, if he has the audacity to say, 'I realise that I bring terror and confusion to the human race; but I must either be miserable or create misery for others, and no one is more dear to me than myself. Let no one blame me for this abominable predilection; it is not a matter of free choice. It is the voice of nature, which never speaks more forcefully within me than when it speaks in my favour. But is it only in my own heart that it makes itself heard with such ferocity? Oh, men! I appeal to all of you as my witness! Who, among you, on the verge of death, would not buy back his life at the expense of the majority of the human race, if he could be sure to do so with impunity and in secret?' 'Yet I am fair and honest', he will continue. 'If my happiness demands that I rid myself of all persons who intrude upon my life, then anyone else may equally rid himself of my presence if it offends him. This only stands to reason, and I agree. I am not so

unjust as to demand from someone else a sacrifice which I am not myself prepared to make for him.'

iv. From the outset I perceive one thing which seems to me admitted by the good and the evil man alike, which is that in all things we must exercise our reason, because man is not just an animal but an animal which thinks; that with regard to any subject there are consequently various ways of discovering the truth; that whoever declines to seek that truth forfeits his status as a man and should be treated by the rest of his kind as a wild beast; and that once the truth has been discovered, whoever refuses to accept it is either insane or morally evil by design.

v. What then shall we reply to this violent interlocutor before smothering him? That everything he says may be reduced to the question of whether he acquires a right over the lives of others in forfeiting control over his own life to them; for he does not wish merely to be happy; he wishes also to be just and by his justice to ward off the ascription of 'evil'; for otherwise we should have to shut him up without any reply. We shall therefore make him see that even if what he repudiates belongs to him so perfectly that he may dispose of it as he likes, and even if the prospect he commends to others were to be truly advantageous to them, he would still have no legitimate authority to make them accept it. We shall point out that whoever says *I wish to live* has as much right on his side as the person who says *I wish to die*; for, as he has only one life, when he abandons it he makes himself master of innumerable other lives. We shall point out that the exchange he proposes would be scarcely just if over the whole earth there were no one else but him and another man just as evil; that it is absurd to wish upon others the same wishes one would entertain for oneself; that it is doubtful whether the hazards he would inflict upon his fellow-man match those to which he would subject himself; that whatever he risks may not be proportionate to what he compels me to put at risk myself; that the question of *natural right* is far more complicated than it appears to him; that he sets himself up as both judge and advocate, and that his tribunal may be incompetent to pronounce on this matter.

vi. But if we deny the individual the right to determine the nature of justice and injustice, before which bar shall we plead this great question? Where? Before mankind. Mankind alone must settle the matter, because it has no other craving than the good of all. Private wills are suspect; they may be either good or bad. But the general will is always

good. It has never beguiled and will never mislead. If the status of animals were roughly equal to our own; if there were reliable means of communication between them and us; if they could transmit their feelings and thoughts to us clearly and come to apprehend our own with equal certainty; if they could, in short, take part in a general assembly, we should have to summon them to it; and the case for *natural right* would no longer be pleaded before the bar of *mankind* but before that of all *animal kind*. But animals are separated from us by fixed and eternal barriers; and we are dealing here with a system of knowledge and ideas peculiar to the human species, arising from and forming its station in the world.

vii. For an individual to know how far he ought to be a man, a citizen, a subject, a father, or a child, and when it befits him to live or die, he must address himself to the general will. It is for the general will to determine the limits of all duties. You have the most sacred *natural right* to everything that is not resisted by the whole human race. It is the general will which shall enlighten you as to the nature of your thoughts and your desires. Everything you conceive, everything you contemplate, will be good, great, elevated, sublime, if it accords with the general and common interest. There is no quality essential to your species apart from that which you demand from all your fellow-men to ensure your happiness and theirs. It is the measure of your conformity to all of them and of all of them to you which determines when you transgress the boundaries of your species and when you remain within them. Hence do not ever lose sight of it, or else you will find that your comprehension of the notions of goodness, justice, humanity and virtue grows dim. Say to yourself often, 'I am a man, and I have no other truly inalienable *natural rights* except those of humanity.'

viii. But, you will ask, in what does this general will reside? Where can I consult it? . . . In the principles of prescribed law of all civilised nations; in the social practices of savage and barbarous peoples; in the tacit agreements obtaining amongst the enemies of mankind; and even in those two emotions – indignation and resentment – which nature has extended as far as animals to compensate for social laws and public retribution.

ix. If you reflect carefully on all the material above, therefore, you will find yourself convinced, (1) that the man who subscribes only to his private will is the enemy of the human race; (2) that the general

will is in each person a pure expression of the understanding, which in the silence of the passions calculates what every individual may demand from his fellow-man, and what his fellow-man has a right to demand of him; (3) that this regard for the general will of the species, and for what is the common desire, forms the rule binding the conduct of one individual towards another in the same society, together with the conduct of an individual towards the whole society to which he belongs, and of that society itself towards other societies; (4) that submission to the general will is the bond which holds all societies together, not excluding those formed by crime. Alas, virtue is so attractive that bandits will respect its image even in the depths of their caves!; (5) that laws should be made for all, and not just for one; since otherwise that one solitary being would be just like the violent interlocutor whom we smothered in section v; (6) that since, as between the two wills – one general and the other private – the general will never errs, there can be no difficulty in perceiving to which of them the legislative power should belong so as to ensure the happiness of mankind, nor in establishing what is owed to those august mortals whose private will unites at once the authority and the infallibility of the general; (7) that even if we were to entertain the supposition that species were in perpetual flux, the nature of *natural right* would not change, since it would always correspond to the general will and the common desire of the whole species; (8) that equity relates to justice as cause to its effect, or that justice can never be anything other than equity made plain; (9) that all these consequences, finally, are evident to anyone who uses his reason, and that whoever chooses not to reason, thereby forfeiting his status as a man, ought to be treated as an unnatural being.⁹

ENCYCLOPÉDIE The aim of an *encyclopedia* is to assemble knowledge scattered across the earth, to reveal its overall structure to our contemporaries and to pass it on to those who will come after us; so that the achievements of past ages do not become worthless for the centuries to come, so that our descendants, in becoming better

⁹ It may well have been to these lines that Rousseau replied, in his *Discours sur l'inégalité*, that 'the state of contemplation is contrary to nature, and man, when he reflects, is a depraved animal'. Although the dates of composition of both 'Droit naturel' and 'Hobbesisme' are uncertain, it seems likely that Diderot drafted these articles before the autumn of 1753 and that Rousseau had access to the manuscript, since other allusions to them can be found in the *Discours sur l'inégalité*, which dates from that period.

informed, may at the same time become more virtuous and content, and so that we do not leave this earth without having earned the respect of the human race.

[Diderot remarks upon the vast scope of a work designed to review everything that touches upon man's curiosity, duties, needs and pleasures. No individual, he claims, perhaps alluding to Ephraïm Chambers, compiler of the *Cyclopaedia* of 1728, could undertake such an immense task on his own. Nor could any literary or scholarly academy, which would be too specialist and devoted only to the improvement of the discipline to which it was attached.] So extensive a project could only be completed by a society of men of letters and artisans, working in different places, each occupied with his own subject, bound together only by the general interest of humanity and a sense of mutual goodwill.

I say men bound together by the general interest of humanity and by a sense of mutual goodwill, because these motives are at once the most honourable impulses of well-born souls, and the most durable. Prompted by them an individual applauds his own deeds; he is stirred into action; he undertakes for his fellow-man and for his friend what we would not do for any other reason; and, if I may testify from experience, his prospect of success in such ventures is more certain. Material for the *Encyclopedia* was quickly assembled. It was no base motive which drew the authors together and hastened their work . . .

If government were to become involved in such an enterprise, it would never be completed. The sole influence which government should have upon it must be limited to that of rendering assistance. With a single word a king may make a palace rise up from a field. But a society of men of letters is not like a gang of workmen. An *encyclopedia* is not produced on command. It is an enterprise better pursued with obstinacy than begun with zeal. Work of this nature is conceived in courtyards, by chance, through conversation. But it never commands sufficient interest to retain abiding attention in the midst of the tumult and confusion of an infinite number of other, more or less important, matters. Literary projects devised by great men are like leaves which bud in spring, wither in autumn, and fall one upon the other, without end, deep in the forest, where the nourishment they offer to some sterile plants is their only perceptible trace . . . [Government patronage can scarcely be expected to promote ventures of this kind. Such support is inspired, not by the utility of the

subject, but by the status of benefactor. Unlike authors, who wish to see the fruits of their endeavours harvested as quickly as possible, governments impose procedures which are slow and cumbersome. Ministers seldom have an interest in completing the projects of their predecessors.]

Of weightiest consideration with regard to these matters is the fact that an *encyclopedia*, like a glossary of terms, must be started, carried through and finished within a certain period of time, whereas squalid interest always intervenes to prolong work ordered by kings. If universal and reasoned dictionaries were to take as many years for their completion as their wide scope would seem to require, then because of revolutionary developments scarcely less rapid in the sciences and especially the arts than in language, the result would be that this dictionary would be that of the previous age, just as a slowly compiled glossary could only be that of an era which has passed. Judgements grow old and disappear like words. The enthusiasm first fired by certain inventions fades day by day and burns out. If the work is protracted one comes to dwell upon matters of just fleeting interest, no longer pertinent . . .

But what above all will make the work seem out-of-date, and bring it into disrepute, is the revolution which will occur in the minds of men, and in the national character. As philosophy today advances with giant strides; as it brings order to all the subjects it embraces; as it sets the predominant fashion under which the yoke of authority and precedent comes to be shaken and to yield to the laws of reason, scarcely one work of dogma survives for which wholehearted approval is felt. Such works come to be perceived as copies of human artifice rather than drawn from the truth of nature. The wisdom of Aristotle and Plato comes to be doubted, and it comes to pass that works which have continued to enjoy the highest reputation lose some of their lustre, and even fall into oblivion. Certain literary genres come to be neglected on account of their failure to reflect real life and current morality, thus losing their permanent poetic validity. Others remain, sustained by their intrinsic value, but only by taking an entirely new form. Such is the effect of the progress of reason, which topples many statues and reassembles others previously struck down. Such are the achievements of those rare men who have appeared ahead of their time. We had contemporaries, if I may put it this way, during the century of Louis XIV.

[Diderot discusses the contribution of several seventeenth-century writers to the progress of ideas, and the extent to which their example has been surpassed or become widely accepted in the eighteenth century.]

Knowledge, however, does not and cannot become common property beyond a certain point. To be sure, the location of that limit is unknown. We do not know how far a man may go. Still less have we any idea of how far the human race might go, of how much it would be capable, if its progress were not brought to a halt. But revolutions are necessary; they always occur and always will occur. The maximum interval between one revolution and another is fixed; that interval alone marks the extent of our achievements. There is, in the sciences, a point beyond which it is almost impossible for them to go. When that point is reached, what survives of the progress that has been achieved remains a permanent marvel for all mankind. But if the efforts of the human race are confined within limits, how much more is an individual so restricted? There is only a certain amount of energy that can be drawn from the resources, animal as well as intellectual, of a single person; his lifespan is brief; he is obliged to rest as well as work; he has needs and passions he must satisfy, and he is prey to an infinite number of distractions . . . [Aside from the accomplishments of the extraordinary individual, moreover], the general mass of mankind can neither follow nor comprehend this march of the human spirit. The highest level of instruction it can master has its limits; from which it follows that there will be works which shall always remain beyond the common grasp of mankind . . .

The most glorious moment for a work [like this *encyclopedia*] would be immediately subsequent to some great revolution which had halted the advance of science, interrupted artistic activity and plunged some part of our hemisphere once again into darkness. What a profound sense of gratitude would be felt by the next generation, after this period of turmoil, towards those who, alarmed about the future and anticipating the havoc, had safeguarded the knowledge of past ages!

[The formation and transmission of knowledge depends upon language, Diderot contends, proceeding to discuss this subject – in terms of vocabulary, speech, syntax, signs, nomenclature, punctuation, grammar, etymology and pronunciation – at considerable length. He then turns to the question of the organisation of the *Encyclopédie* and to the links between particular entries.]

There is an infinite number of points of view by which both the real world and the world of ideas can be represented, and the number of possible systems of human knowledge is as great as the number of such points of view . . . [In choosing a particular system] one consideration above all should be borne in mind, in effect, that if mankind, or the thinking and contemplative beings which comprise it, were banished from the surface of the earth, the moving and sublime spectacle of nature would be nothing more than a scene of desolation and silence. The universe would be mute; stillness and night would take possession of it. Everything would be transformed into a vast emptiness where unremarked phenomena would occur, dimly and unheard. It is the presence of man which renders other beings interesting, and what better consideration can we bring to bear in dealing with the history of such creatures? Why should we not introduce man into our work, as he has been placed in the universe? Why not make man the central focus? . . .

This is what made us decide to locate the general organisation of our work in the principal faculties of man [i.e. memory, reason and imagination] . . . Man must be the unique point of departure and the point to which all must lead back, if you wish to please, interest and affect people even in the plainest matters and the most barren details . . .

[Diderot next discusses a number of problems pertaining mainly to the order, balance and cross-referencing of entries in the *Encyclopédie*.]

We have come to see that the *Encyclopédie* could only be undertaken in a philosophical age, such as has now arrived . . . That is because this work requires much bolder thinking than is the rule in those faint-hearted centuries in which insipid taste alone prevails. Everything must be examined, everything investigated, without hesitation or exception. We must dare to see . . . that literary genres, no less than the general codification of laws and the establishment of towns, owe their birth to a chance event, some freak accident or flight of genius. Those who succeeded the first innovators have, for the most part, been captive to them; achievements which should have been regarded as the first step were blindly taken to be the last word; instead of conducting an art towards its perfection, they have merely retarded its development by reducing other men to the servile condition of copyists. As soon as a name was given to a composition of a particular kind, it became necessary to draw all others rigorously from this sketch. If

from time to time a man of original and bold genius appeared who, weary of received opinion, dared to challenge it, to stray from the common road and to strike out on a path for which the markings and prescribed course were not precisely applicable, he fell into oblivion and stayed there. Such puerile restrictions must be stamped out; any barriers not set up by reason must be overthrown. The arts and sciences must be granted the freedom which is so vital to them, and the admirers of antiquity must be told: call *The London Merchant*¹⁰ whatever you like, provided you agree that this play sparkles with sublime beauty. These changes required a judicious age, in which rules were sought, not from authors but in nature, where the distinction between truth and falsity in so many arbitrarily determined aesthetics would be made clear.

[Diderot next turns his attention and tribute to the precursors of the *Encyclopédie* and to its contributors, lamenting that, with the superabundance of books already available, 'it would soon become as difficult to acquire an education in a library as in the universe'.]

The praise of a gentleman is the sweetest and most worthy recompense of another gentleman; after the approval of one's conscience the most flattering esteem is that of an upright man. Oh Rousseau, my dear and worthy friend, I never had the strength to hold back from acclaiming you; in that praise I felt grow my longing for the truth and my love of virtue. Why are there so many funeral orations and so few tributes to the living? . . .

A universal dictionary of the arts and sciences should be regarded as an immense terrain covered with mountains, plains, rocks, water, forests, animals and everything that lends variety to a great landscape. The light from the sky illuminates them all, but they are each struck by it differently . . .

An experienced editor in full possession of his faculties will imagine himself among men of average intelligence. If nature had raised him to the level of great genius from which he never descended, conversing incessantly with persons of the profoundest insight, he would come to regard matters from a point of view so lofty that most men could not grasp it. Too much beyond the range of humanity, his work would become obscure for most readers. But if

¹⁰ *The London Merchant or the History of George Barnwell* (1731) by George Lillo, a play which made a powerful impression on Diderot, and to which he refers as well in his *Entretiens sur le fils naturel*.

unfortunately he found himself, or if he had the good grace to lower himself, well beneath the level of the common man, his treatment of subjects, presented as if for imbeciles, would be fastidiously long-winded. He will therefore regard the world as his school and the human race as his pupil, and he will give lessons in such a way that intelligent men will not lose precious time and the mass of ordinary people will not be put off. There are two kinds of men, almost equivalently small in number, who ought to be equally neglected – that is transcendental geniuses and imbeciles, neither of whom have any need of instruction . . .

VOLUME VIII (1765)

HOBBISME [Diderot provides a biography of Hobbes and expounds his philosophy, including his political philosophy, with reference to the *Leviathan*.] *The character of Hobbes*. Nature endowed Hobbes with mental audacity and such gifts as inspire the respect of other men. He had a judicious mind of vast scope, penetration and profundity. His opinions are his own and his ideas are uncommon. Although he studied widely, and knew much, he made insufficient use of his learning. This is because of his propensity for meditation, which led him to uncover the mainsprings of human action. Even his mistakes have contributed more to the advance of the human mind than a host of works strung together with commonplace knowledge. He had the fault of systematic thinkers, that is, of generalising from particular facts and skilfully bending them to fit his hypothesis. His works are fit only for nature and attentive readers. No one argues with greater rigour or reason. Take care not to go beyond his first principles, if you do not wish to follow him everywhere he cares to lead you.

The philosophy of Monsieur Rousseau of Geneva is almost the inverse of that of Hobbes. The one thinks man naturally good, and the other thinks him wicked. For the philosopher of Geneva the state of nature is a state of peace; for the philosopher of Malmesbury it is a state of war. If you follow Hobbes, you are convinced that laws and the formation of society have made men better, while if you follow Monsieur Rousseau, you believe instead that they have depraved him. One was born in the midst of tumult and factions; the other lived in civilised society, and among men of learning. Different times, different circumstances, different philosophies. Monsieur Rousseau

writes with eloquence and emotion; Hobbes is dry, austere and forceful. The latter saw the Crown shaken, his fellow-citizens armed one against the other, and his country soaked with blood on account of religious fanaticism. He took aversion to God, to clergymen, to churches. The former saw men who were versed in every sphere of knowledge tear each other apart, loathe one another, give themselves up to their passions, covet reputation, riches and honours, and conduct themselves in a manner scarcely commensurate with the learning they had mastered. He thus loathed knowledge and clever thinkers. Both men were extreme. Between their two systems there is another which may convey the truth: in effect that, although the human condition is one of perpetual strife, man's goodness and wickedness remain constant, his happiness and suffering circumscribed by limits he cannot breach. All the benefits of human industry are balanced by evils, all natural evils by good works. Hobbes, supremely confident of his own judgement, lived according to his precepts; he was a gentleman, a loyal subject of his king, a zealous citizen, a simple man, upright, candid and charitable. He had both friends and enemies. He incurred boundless praise and blame. Most men who shudder on hearing his name have neither read nor are fit to read a single page of his works. Whatever good or evil may be ascribed to him, he left the world exactly as he found it. He cared little for experimental philosophy: if to conduct experiments is to be a philosopher, he claimed, then the cook, the perfumer and the distiller are all philosophers. He despised Bayle¹¹ and was in turn scorned by him. He managed to overturn the idol of the school which Bacon had launched. He had been found at fault for introducing new terms into his philosophy, but it would have been impossible, on account of his singular outlook upon the world, for him to stick to a settled vocabulary. If he was not an atheist, it must be acknowledged that his god scarcely differs from that of Spinoza. His definition of the nature of evil strikes me as sublime. The evil man, according to Hobbes, is a vigorous child; *malus est puer robustus*.¹² In fact, evil is the more powerful when reason is feeble and the passions are strong. Imagine a six-week old child with the imbecility of mind appropriate to its age and the strength and passions of a man of forty. He will manifestly strike down his father, ravish his

¹¹ Not Bayle, but Robert Boyle, the chemist and one of the founders of the Royal Society.

¹² An allusion to a passage from the preface of Hobbes's *De cive* which may have served as Rousseau's source for a fuller treatment of the subject in his *Discours sur l'inégalité*.

mother and strangle his nurse. No one who approaches him will be secure. As man becomes good with the acquisition of knowledge, so is the definition of Hobbes false . . .

INTOLÉRANCE The word *intolerance* is generally understood to refer to that fierce passion which drives people to hate and persecute those who are in the wrong. But so as not to mix up very different things, it is necessary to distinguish two kinds of *intolerance* – ecclesiastical and civil.

Ecclesiastical *intolerance* consists in regarding as false every other religion apart from one's own, and in proclaiming this religion from the rooftops without any inhibitions of fear, respect for others, or even concern for the preservation of one's life. This article will not address such heroism, which has produced so many martyrs of the Church down the ages.

Civil *intolerance* consists in breaking all relations with other men and in pursuing, by violent means of every sort, those whose way of thinking about God and His worship is different from one's own.

A few lines drawn from Holy Scripture, from the Fathers and Councils, will suffice to show that the *intolerant* person taken in this last sense is a wicked man, a bad Christian, a dangerous subject, a poor politician and a bad citizen. [Diderot cites a passage from Tertullian to the effect that religious belief must be voluntary and not extracted by force.] . . .

It is impious to expose religion to the odious imputations of tyranny, of callousness, of injustice, of unsociability, even with the aim of drawing back to the fold those who would unfortunately have strayed from it.

The mind may only acquiesce to that which it regards as true; the heart may only love what it takes to be good. Violence will render a man a hypocrite, if he is weak; a martyr, if he is courageous. Weak or courageous, he will feel with indignation the injustice of the persecution.

Instruction, persuasion and prayer – these are the only legitimate means of spreading religion . . .

Every practice tending to stir up the people, to arm nations and soak the soil with blood, is impious.

It is impious to seek to impose laws upon conscience, the universal principle of our actions. Conscience must be enlightened and not

constrained. Men who fall into error in good faith should be pitied, never punished. Neither men of good faith nor men of bad faith should be subject to torment; judgement over them must be left to God. If there can be no dealings with whoever is called blasphemous, then there can be none with whoever is called miserly, immodest, ambitious, irascible, vicious. Such a break will be prescribed to others, and three or four *intolerant* persons will suffice to rend the whole of society asunder . . . [Diderot cites the testimony of Christ, St Paul, Origen and others.]

In an *intolerant* state, the prince would be simply a torturer, under the sway of the priest. The prince is the common father of his subjects, and his mission is to make them all happy . . .

If your truth proscribes me, then my error, which I take for the truth, will proscribe you.

Cease to be violent, or cease to reproach the pagans and Muslims for being violent.

When you hate your brother, and preach hatred to your neighbour, is it the spirit of God which inspires you? Christ has said: *My Kingdom is not of this world*, and you, his disciples, wish to tyrannise over this world! [Diderot cites the testimony of Christ, St Augustine, numerous Christian Fathers and other authorities.]

Which is the way of humanity? Is it that of the persecutor who strikes, or that of the persecuted who cries out? If an unbelieving prince has an indisputable right to demand obedience from his subject, an incredulous subject has an undeniable right to demand protection from his prince. It is a reciprocal obligation.

If the prince says that the incredulous subject has no right to life, is there not reason to fear that the subject will claim that the unbelieving prince has no right to rule?

Intolerant men, men of bloodshed, behold the consequences of your principles, and shudder. Men whom I love, whatever your feelings, it is for you that I have collected these thoughts, which I beg you to contemplate. Think about them, and you will renounce an atrocious system which suits neither the integrity of the mind nor the happiness of the heart.

Bring about your own salvation. Pray for mine, and recognise that everything you allow yourself beyond that is an appalling injustice in the eyes of God and men.

The *Supplément au Voyage de*
Bougainville

Editorial preface

Diderot drafted his review of Bougainville's *Voyage autour du monde* in 1771, shortly after the work was published. Although in the *Voyage* the material on Tahiti occupied just two brief chapters, it was that material which most attracted Diderot's attention; and his treatment of it, together with an amplification of his direct appeal to Bougainville in the review to leave Tahiti as he found it, forms the major part of the first two sections of the *Supplément*. By October 1772 Diderot had recast and expanded the review as a dialogue within a dialogue which took up themes from two of his short stories that would first be circulated in Grimm's *Correspondance littéraire* in 1773, and in this new form the *Supplément*, now described as a 'Suite des contes de M. Diderot', was also circulated in successive issues of that manuscript periodical. He thereafter continued to enlarge the work, mainly in the final section, to which some of the additions may even be by his disciple and editor of the 1798 collection of his *Œuvres*, Jacques-André Naigeon; and he then intercalated the episode devoted to Polly Baker, drawn from the original (1770) edition of Raynal's *Histoire des Deux Indes*. The *Supplément* was first published, from an unknown manuscript, and without the Polly Baker episode, by Bourlet de Vauxcelles, in 1796, in a collection of pieces entitled *Opuscules philosophiques et littéraires*.

While no manuscript of the text in Diderot's hand has survived, four manuscripts are still extant, in addition to the transcriptions of the *Correspondance littéraire*. The earliest, to which Diderot himself made some corrections, also appears to date from 1772. This manuscript, lodged with the Diderot papers at the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris (the Fonds Vandeul), comprises the text from which the 1955 edition by Herbert Dieckmann is drawn, and it most closely approximates the versions which appeared in the *Correspondance littéraire*. The other manuscripts include a second, transcribed by Naigeon, and a third, a version bowdlerised by

Diderot's son-in-law, Vandeul, from the fourth, which was only uncovered in 1912, in St Petersburg, among the papers that Diderot bequeathed to Catherine II of Russia. In this, its most complete, form the work is divided into five sections, whereas most of the earlier versions had contained just four. The first section is a conversation about Bougainville's *Voyage* between two gentlemen identified only as A and B; the second, a parting address to Bougainville's sailors by one of the island's chiefs; the third, a dialogue between the ship's chaplain and Orou, a native attributed with a rich command of Spanish, followed by a resumption of the original conversation and the Polly Baker episode; the fourth, a continuation of the dialogue of the third; and the fifth, in which A and B draw general lessons from the preceding exchanges. The St Petersburg or Leningrad manuscript furnishes the text of the 1935 edition of the *Supplément* by Gilbert Chinard and the 1989 edition by the Centre d'étude du XVIII^e siècle de Montpellier for the Hermann collection of Diderot's *Œuvres complètes*. Our translation follows these two texts and is therefore also based on the St Petersburg manuscript. In the last few pages we have put in square brackets [] some passages which Naigeon added to the margin of his original transcription; a few lines, absent from the St Petersburg manuscript but present in earlier versions, are indicated by angled brackets < >.

**Supplement to the voyage of Bougainville,
or dialogue between A and B
on the inappropriateness of attaching
moral ideas to certain physical actions
that do not accord with them**

But how much better, and how different from this, is the course prompted by Nature, rich in her own resources. If you would only make proper use of them, and not confuse what should be avoided with what is desirable! Do you think it makes no difference, whether your distress is your own fault or due to circumstances?

(Horace, *Satires*, l.ii.73-77)

I

JUDGEMENT OF BOUGAINVILLE'S VOYAGE

A - That superb star-studded sky under which we came back yesterday, and which seemed to promise such fine weather, has failed to keep its word.

B - How can you be sure?

A - The fog's so thick it conceals our view of those nearby trees.

B - Perhaps, but the fog only hovers near the ground because the atmosphere's already filled with moisture. Suppose it were to condense and fall to earth?

A - And if, on the contrary, it were to rise above that layer of moist air into the upper atmosphere which, as the chemists say, is unsaturated?

B - We'll have to wait and see.

A - And while waiting, what are you doing?

B – I'm reading.

A – Still the *Voyage* of Bougainville?

B – Just so.

A – I can't make that man out. When he was young, he was drawn to mathematics, which presupposes a sedentary life. Then he suddenly abandons the retiring and contemplative mode for the active, rough, restless and dissipated life of the explorer.

B – Not at all. Think of the ship as no more than a floating house, and the navigator of an immense distance as actually shut up and confined within the smallest space. You can envisage him encircling the globe on a plank, as you and I might cross the universe on our floor.

A – Another strange thing is the contradiction between the man's character and his achievement. Bougainville has a taste for the delights of society. He loves women, the theatre and fine food. He takes to the social whirl with the same good grace he displays when confronting the uncertain elements which toss him about. He's affable and light-hearted. He's a true Frenchman, balancing a treatise of integral and differential calculus on one side, with a voyage round the world on the other.

B – He's no different from anyone else. After he has applied himself he looks for distraction, and after distraction he applies himself.

A – What do you think of his voyage?

B – So far as I can tell from a rather superficial reading, it has three chief merits: it offers us a better understanding of this old earth and its inhabitants; greater safety on the seas he sailed, with a sounding line in his hand; and more accuracy in our charts. Bougainville set out on his journey with the qualities and skills he required: philosophy, courage and veracity; a quick eye for the heart of the matter; circumspection and patience; a real desire to see, to be enlightened, to learn; a knowledge of calculus, mechanics, geometry and astronomy; and a sufficient grasp of natural history.

A – How about his style?

B – Unaffected, direct, simple and clear, especially if you're familiar with the language of sailors.

A – Was it a long voyage?

B – I've traced it on this globe. Do you see that line of red dots?

A – Starting from Nantes?

B – And running to the Straits of Magellan, entering the Pacific Ocean, winding through the islands that form the great archipelago

which extends from the Philippines to New Holland,¹ skirting Madagascar and the Cape of Good Hope, and then proceeding into the Atlantic, hugging the coast of Africa, and finally ending up at the point of departure.

A – Did he have a hard time?

B – Every navigator takes risks, and willingly exposes himself to the perils of air, fire, land and water. But after having wandered for months on end between sea and sky, and between life and death; after being battered by storms and menaced with death, by shipwreck, disease, hunger and thirst; when, with his ship smashed into pieces, such an unfortunate figure turns up, collapsing in exhaustion and despair at the feet of an obdurate monster who turns him away, or pitilessly makes him wait for the most urgent help – that's dreadful.

A – Indeed, a crime that should be punished.

B – One of those calamities our explorer did not anticipate.

A – And shouldn't have had to. I imagined that the European powers only sent out decent souls to their overseas territories, men of benign disposition, humane and capable of compassion . . .

B – You imagined precisely what's least on their minds.

A – Are any extraordinary phenomena reported in Bougainville's *Voyage*?

B – Many.

A – Doesn't he claim that wild animals come right up to men, that birds fly down and perch on them, unaware of the dangers of such familiarity?

B – This had been noticed by others before him.

A – How does he explain the presence of certain animals on islands separated from every continent by a vast expanse of sea? Who could have transported wolves, foxes, dogs, deer and snakes there?

B – He explains nothing; he only confirms the fact.

A – And what about you? How do you explain it?

B – Who knows the early history of our earth? How many great tracts of land, now isolated, were once joined? The only clue on which we might base some conjecture is the shape of the bodies of water which divide them.

A – How so?

B – I mean by extrapolating from the missing pieces. One day we'll

¹Australia.

fool about with that problem, if it suits us. For the moment, do you see this speck, called Lancer's Island?² In considering its position on the globe, wouldn't anyone ask how it was that men came to be there? What form of communication once linked them to the rest of their species? What will become of them if they go on multiplying in a space no more than a league³ in diameter?

A – No doubt they slaughter and devour one another. Perhaps such insularity explains the origins of a very ancient and quite natural form of cannibalism.

B – Or proliferation is limited by some superstitious law. Perhaps babies are crushed in their mothers' wombs, trampled under the feet of a priestess.

A – Or men have their throats cut by a priest. Or else there is recourse to the castration of males . . .

B – Or women undergo infibulation, which gives rise to so many bizarre customs, at once cruel and necessary, for which the justification is lost in the mists of antiquity, leaving philosophers at their wits' end to explain them. It appears to be a fairly universal rule that supernatural and divinely inspired practices grow stronger and more durable with time, eventually becoming transformed into civil and national laws, while civil and national institutions become consecrated and degenerate into supernatural and divine precepts.

A – What a dreadful cycle!

B – Just one more twist in the chain by which we're bound.

A – Wasn't Bougainville in Paraguay at the very moment the Jesuits were expelled?

B – Yes.

A – What does he say about that?

B – Less than he could have done, but enough to make clear that these cruel sons of Sparta in their black habits mistreated their Indian slaves no less than the Lacedemonians abused their helots, condemning them to incessant work, slaking their own thirst with their sweat, leaving them no right of property, brutalising them by the force of superstition, demanding the deepest reverence, striding among them, whip in hand, lashing out against everyone, of any age or sex. After another hundred years it would have proved impossible to get rid of them, or else the attempt would have sparked a long war between

² The islet of Akiaki, in the Tuamotu Archipelago.

³ About three miles.

these monks and the sovereign whose authority they'd been undermining bit by bit.

A – And those Patagonians about whom Doctor Maty⁴ and the academician, La Condamine,⁵ have made such a fuss?

B – They're fine people, strong and energetic, who spring at you with embraces, crying out 'Chaoua'. But none of them is more than 5 feet 5 or 6 inches tall;⁶ there's nothing gigantic about them apart from their corpulence, the size of their heads and the thickness of their limbs.

A – Since we're all born with a taste for the exotic, magnifying everything around us, how could a man settle for the correct dimensions of things, when obliged, as it were, to justify the journey he's made and the trouble he's taken to travel so far to see them? So what's his assessment of savages?

B – That the cruelty among them which has sometimes been observed is apparently due only to their daily need to defend themselves against wild beasts. The savage is innocent and gentle whenever his peace and security are left undisturbed. All wars spring from conflicting claims to the same property. A civilised man living at one end of a field lays claim to owning the whole of it against another who lives at the opposite end, and the field thus becomes a subject of dispute between them.

A – And the tiger has a like claim against the savage for the possession of a forest. This must be the oldest of all claims and the most fundamental cause of war. Have you seen the Tahitian whom Bougainville took on board and brought back to this country?

B – I have indeed; his name was Aotourou. He took the first land he saw to be the explorer's native country, either because he'd been deceived about the length of the voyage, or because he was confused as to the true extent of the earth, on account of the apparently short distance from the sea-shore where he lived to the point where the sky closed in on the horizon. The common enjoyment of women was a

⁴Matthew Maty (1718–76), one-time Librarian of the British Museum, and a man of notoriously diminutive stature, much persuaded by eighteenth-century accounts of giants in Patagonia.

⁵Charles Marie de La Condamine (1701–74), mathematician and explorer, author of the *Relation abrégée d'un voyage fait dans l'intérieur de l'Amérique méridionale* [1745] (Paris 1749).

⁶Diderot here contradicts his source, since Bougainville had claimed that Patagonians are not less than 5 feet 5 or 6 inches tall.

practice so well-established in his mind that he threw himself upon the first European female he encountered and set about most earnestly extending to her one of the courtesies of Tahiti. But he soon found life among us tedious. Because the Tahitian alphabet contains no *c, d, f, g, q, x, y* or *z*, our language confronted his inflexible speech organs with too many strange articulations and new sounds, and he could never learn to speak it. He never overcame a longing for his country, and I'm not surprised. The account of Bougainville's voyage is the only one which has ever drawn me to any country other than my own. Until I read it, I imagined that nowhere could one be as happy as at home, and I assumed that everyone on earth felt the same: a natural consequence of the attraction of the soil, itself bound up with the comforts it affords and which one doubts finding elsewhere.

A – What? Don't you believe that an inhabitant of Paris is quite convinced that the same grain will grow in the fields of the Roman Campagna as in those of the Beauce?⁷

B – Good Lord, no! Bougainville sent Aotourou home, after providing for his expenses and ensuring his safe-conduct.

A – Oh, Aotourou! How glad you'll be to see your father, mother, brothers, sisters, compatriots again! What will you tell them about us?

B – Precious little, which they won't believe anyway.

A – Why precious little?

B – Because he had such a slight grasp of things here, and will not find terms in his language that correspond to the meagre impressions he formed.

A – And why won't they believe him?

B – Because in comparing their own ways with others, they'll prefer to regard Aotourou a liar than to think us so mad.

A – Really?

B – I'm quite sure of it. The life of the savage is so simple, and our societies are such complicated machines. The Tahitian is close to the origins of the world and the European near its old age. The gulf between us is greater than that separating the new-born child from the decrepit dotard. The Tahitian either fails entirely to understand our customs and laws, or he sees them as nothing but fetters disguised in a hundred different ways, which can only inspire indignation and

⁷A grain-growing region of France southwest of Paris with especially fertile soil.

scorn in those for whom the love of liberty is the deepest of all feelings.

A – Are you falling prey to the myth of Tahiti?

B – It's not a myth, and you wouldn't doubt Bougainville's sincerity if you knew the Supplement to his Voyage.

A – And where can one find this Supplement?

B – Right over there, on that table.

A – Won't you let me borrow it?

B – No, but we can go through it together, if you'd like.

A – Of course, I would. Look. The fog is settling, and the blue sky is beginning to pierce its way through. It seems to be my fate to be mistaken in every exchange with you, even over trifles. I must be very virtuous to forgive such unremitting superiority.

B – Hold on, now. Read. Skip over the preamble, which comes to nothing, and go straight to the farewell address to our explorers given by one of the island's chiefs. That will give you some idea of the eloquence of these people.

A – How could Bougainville understand such tidings if they were conveyed in a language he didn't know?

B – You'll find out.

II

THE OLD MAN'S FAREWELL

The speaker is an old man. He was the father of a large family. When the Europeans arrived he looked upon them with scorn, showing neither astonishment, nor fear, nor curiosity. On their approach he turned his back and retired to his hut. Yet his silence and anxiety revealed his thoughts only too well; he was inwardly lamenting the eclipse of his countrymen's happiness. When Bougainville was leaving the island, as the natives swarmed on the shore, clutching his clothes, clasping his companions in their arms and weeping, the old man made his way forward and proclaimed solemnly, 'Weep, wretched natives of Tahiti, weep. But let it be for the coming and not the leaving of these ambitious, wicked men. One day you will know them better. One day they will come back, bearing in one hand the piece of wood you see in that man's belt, and, in the other, the sword

hanging by the side of that one, to enslave you, slaughter you, or make you captive to their follies and vices. One day you will be subject to them, as corrupt, vile and miserable as they are. But I have this consolation. My life is drawing to its close, and I shall not see the calamity I foretell. Oh fellow Tahitians, oh my friends! There is one way to avert a dreadful fate, but I would rather die than counsel you to take it. Let them leave, and let them live.'

Then turning to Bougainville, he continued, 'And you, leader of the ruffians who obey you, pull your ship away swiftly from these shores. We are innocent, we are content, and you can only spoil that happiness. We follow the pure instincts of nature, and you have tried to erase its impression from our hearts. Here, everything belongs to everyone, and you have preached I can't tell what distinction between "yours" and "mine". Our daughters and our wives belong to us all. You shared that privilege with us, and you enflamed them with a frenzy they had never known before. They have become wild in your arms, and you have become deranged in theirs. They have begun to hate each other. You have butchered one another for them, and they have come back stained with your blood. We are free, but into our earth you have now staked your title to our future servitude. You are neither a god nor a demon. Who are you, then, to make them slaves? Orou, you who understand the language of these men, tell us all, as you have told me, what they have written on that strip of metal: *This land is ours*. So this land is yours? Why? Because you set foot on it! If a Tahitian should one day land on your shores and engrave on one of your stones or on the bark of one of your trees, *This land belongs to the people of Tahiti*, what would you think then? You are stronger than we are, and what does that mean? When one of the miserable trinkets with which your ship is filled was taken away, what an uproar you made, what revenge you exacted! At that very moment, in the depths of your heart, you were plotting the theft of an entire country! You are not a slave, you would rather die than be one, and yet you wish to make slaves of us. Do you suppose, then, that a Tahitian cannot defend his own liberty and die for it as well? This inhabitant of Tahiti, whom you wish to ensnare like an animal, is your brother. You are both children of Nature. What right do you have over him that he does not have over you? You came; did we attack you? Have we plundered your ship? Did we seize you and expose you to the arrows

of our enemies? Did we harness you to work with our animals in the fields? We respected our own image in you.

'Leave us to our ways; they are wiser and more decent than yours. We have no wish to exchange what you call our ignorance for your useless knowledge. Everything that we need and is good for us we already possess. Do we merit contempt because we have not learnt how to acquire superfluous needs? When we are hungry, we have enough to eat. When we are cold, we have enough to wear. You have entered our huts; what do you suppose we lack? Pursue as far as you wish what you call the comforts of life, but let sensible beings stop when they have no more to gain from their labours than imaginary benefits. If you persuade us to go beyond the strict bounds of necessity, when will we finish our work? When will we enjoy ourselves? We have kept our annual and daily labours within the smallest possible limits, because in our eyes nothing is better than rest. Go back to your own country to agitate and torment yourself as much as you like. But leave us in peace. Do not fill our heads with your factitious needs and illusory virtues. Look at these men. See how upright, healthy and robust they are. Look at these women. See how they too stand up straight, how healthy, fresh and lovely they are. Take this bow; it's mine. Call upon one, two, three, four of your comrades, and together with them try to draw it. I draw it unaided; I till the soil; I climb mountains; I go through the forest; I can run a league across the plain in less than an hour; your young companions can hardly keep up with me, and yet I'm more than ninety years old.

'Woe to this island! Woe to all present Tahitians and to those still to come, from the day of your arrival! We used to know but one disease, old age, to which men, animals and plants were all equally prey, but you have now brought us another. You have infected our blood. Perhaps we shall be forced to wipe out, with our own hands, our daughters, our wives, our children, those who have lain with your women, and those who have been with your men. Our fields will be soaked with the foul blood which has passed from your veins into ours, or our children will be condemned to nourish and perpetuate the evil you inflicted on their fathers and mothers and which shall henceforth be forever passed onto their descendants. Wretched man. You must bear guilt, either for the ravages that will follow the deadly caresses of your people, or for the murders we shall commit to arrest

the poison. You speak of crimes. Can you imagine any worse than yours? What is the punishment, where you come from, for the murder of your neighbour? Death by the sword. Where you come from, what is the punishment for the coward who poisons his victim? Death by fire. Compare your own offence to this second crime and tell us, scourge of nations, what punishment you deserve? A short while ago a young maiden of Tahiti would yield blissfully to the embraces of a Tahitian youth, once she had reached the age of marriage; she would wait impatiently for her mother to lift her veil and expose her breasts; she was proud to stir the desires and attract the amorous glances of a stranger, her relatives, her brother. Without fear or shame, in our presence, in the midst of a circle of innocent Tahitians, to the sound of flutes and between the dances, she welcomed the caresses of the youth whom her young heart and the secret promptings of her senses had selected for her. It was you who first brought the idea of crime and the risk of illness to us.

‘Our pleasures, once so sweet, are now accompanied with remorse and fear. That man in black by your side, who is listening to me, spoke to our young men; I do not know what he said to our girls, but now they blush and the boys hesitate. If you wish, creep away into the dark forest with the perverse partner of your pleasures, but let the good and simple inhabitants of Tahiti multiply without shame in the light of day under the open sky. What more honest and noble sentiment can you put in the place of the one which we have inspired in them and which nurtures them? When they believe the moment has arrived to enrich the nation and the family with a new citizen, they exalt in it. They eat to live, and to grow; they grow to multiply, and in that they see neither vice nor shame. Take heed of the effects of your offences. You had hardly arrived among them before they became thieves. You had hardly set foot on our soil before it reeked of blood. The Tahitian who ran to meet you, to greet you, who welcomed you crying, “*taïo*, friend, friend”, you killed. And why did you kill him? Because he had been tempted by the glitter of your little serpent’s eggs. He offered you his fruits, his wife, his daughter, his hut, and you killed him for a handful of beads which he took without asking. At the sound of your murderous weapons the others were seized by terror and fled to the hills. But rest assured that they would soon have returned and, in an instant, but for me, would have destroyed you.

Ah! Why did I appease them? Why did I hold them back? Why do I hold them back even now? I don't know, for with your unfeeling heart you can have no sense of pity and do not deserve any.

'You and your men have wandered where you please throughout our island. You were respected; you enjoyed everything; you were neither rebuffed nor obstructed in your way; you were invited; you joined us. We spread out before you the abundance of our country. When you desired young girls, all (except those not yet entitled to show their face and breasts) were placed before you completely naked by their mothers. That was how you took possession of the tender victim of our obligations as hosts; leaves and flowers were strewn upon the ground for her and for you; musicians tuned their instruments; nothing disturbed the sweetness nor interfered with the liberty of her caresses and yours. Hymns were sung, exhorting you to be a man, and our child to be a woman, compliant and voluptuous. We danced around your bed, and, for your part, after leaving the arms of that woman, after drawing from her breast the sweetest intoxication, you slaughtered her brother, her friend, perhaps her father. You have done worse still. Look over there. See that enclosure bristling with arrows; those arms which had once only menaced our enemies are now turned on our own children. Look upon the unhappy partners of your pleasures. See their sadness, the grief of their fathers, the despair of their mothers. That is where they are condemned to die, either by our hands or from the disease you passed on to them. Go away now, unless your cruel eyes relish the spectacle of death. Go away, leave, and may the seas that spared you on your voyage absolve themselves of their guilt and avenge us by swallowing you up before your return. And you, inhabitants of Tahiti, go back to your huts. Go back and let these unworthy foreigners hear nothing as they depart but the roaring waves. Let them see nothing but the foaming spray as it whitens a deserted shore.'

He had scarcely finished speaking before the crowd of natives disappeared. A great silence stretched over the island. Nothing was to be heard but the dry whistling of the wind and the muffled breaking of the waves, all the length of the coast. It was as if the air and the sea had absorbed the man's words and were moved to obey him.

B – Well now! What do you think of that?

A – The speech seems fierce to me, but in spite of what I find abrupt and primitive, I detect ideas and turns of phrase which appear European.

B – Bear in mind that it's a translation from Tahitian into Spanish, and from Spanish into French. The previous night the old man had made a visit to that same Orou to whom he called out the next day, in whose home knowledge of the Spanish language had been preserved for generations. Orou had written down the speech of the old man in Spanish, and Bougainville had a copy of it in his hand while the old man spoke.

A – I can now understand only too well why Bougainville suppressed this fragment. But I perceive that there's more, and I haven't just a fleeting curiosity to see the rest.

B – What follows may interest you less.

A – No matter.

B – It's a conversation between the expedition's chaplain and an inhabitant of the island.

A – Orou?

B – The very same. When Bougainville's ship neared the shore of Tahiti a great mass of hollowed-out trees was launched on the water. In an instant, his vessel was encircled; wherever he turned his gaze he witnessed demonstrations of surprise and goodwill. Food was thrown to him, arms were outstretched, ropes were fastened, natives clambered up the ship's sides. They filled the captain's gig, shouting to the shore, from where their cries were answered. The inhabitants of the island ran out. There they were, then, all disembarked; they laid hold of the ship's crew, each making a choice and conducting his guest to his hut, the men clasping them round their waist, the women stroking their cheeks with their hands. Imagine what it must have been like to be there. Witness in your mind's eye this spectacle of hospitality, and tell me what you think of the human race.

A – Very attractive.

B – But I almost forgot to tell you of a very strange event. This display of goodwill and humanity was suddenly interrupted by the cries of a man who called out for help. It was the servant of one of Bougainville's officers. Several young Tahitians had hurled themselves upon him, stretched him out on the ground and taken off his clothes, and were about to render him the usual courtesies.

A – What! Do you mean that these simple savages, so good, so decent . . .

B – You misunderstand. The servant was a woman disguised as a man. Though she'd been undetected by any of the crew throughout the whole of a long journey, the Tahitians guessed her sex at first glance. She had been born in Burgundy. Her name was Barre. Twenty-six years old, she was neither beautiful nor ugly. She had never left her village, and her first thought of a journey was to circumnavigate the globe. She showed courage and good sense at all times.

A – Such frail constitutions sometimes lodge a strong character.

III

THE CONVERSATION BETWEEN THE CHAPLAIN AND OROU

In the division of Bougainville's crew by the Tahitians, the chaplain was allotted to Orou. They were roughly the same age, around thirty-five or thirty-six years old. At the time Orou had only his wife and three children, who were called Asto, Palli and Thia. They undressed the chaplain, washed his face, hands and feet, and served him a wholesome and frugal meal. When he was about to go to bed, Orou, who had stepped out with his family, reappeared, presented him with his wife and three daughters, each of them naked, and said, 'You have eaten, you are young and in good health; if you go to bed alone, you will sleep badly. At night a man needs a companion beside him. Here is my wife; here are my daughters. Choose whomever you prefer; but if you wish to oblige me you will select the youngest of my daughters, who is still childless.' 'Alas', added the mother. 'I don't hold it against her, poor Thia! It's not her fault.'

The chaplain replied that his religion, his holy orders, morality and decency all prohibited him from accepting Orou's offer.

Orou answered: 'I don't know what you mean by "religion", but I can only think ill of it, since it prevents you from enjoying an innocent pleasure to which Nature, that sovereign mistress, invites every person: that is, of bringing into the world one of your own kind; rendering a service which the father, mother and children all ask of you; repaying a gracious host, and enriching a nation by adding one more subject to it. I don't know what you mean by "holy orders", but your first duty is to be a man and to show gratitude. I'm not asking you to

take back the ways of Orou to your country, but Orou, your host and friend, begs that here you accept the ways of Tahiti. Whether the ways of Tahiti are better or worse than yours is an easy question to settle. Has the land of your birth more people than it can feed? In that case your ways are neither worse nor better than ours. Can it feed more than it has? In that case our ways are better than yours. As for the decency which holds you back, I quite understand. I admit I'm wrong and ask that you forgive me. I don't insist that you put your health in danger. If you are tired, you must rest; but I trust that you will not continue to disappoint us. Look at the sorrow you've brought to all these faces. They're afraid you have detected blemishes in them which have aroused your distaste. But even if that were so, wouldn't the pleasure of doing a good deed, of ensuring that one of my daughters was honoured among her companions and sisters – wouldn't that suffice for you? Be generous.'

The chaplain – It's not that. They are all four of them equally beautiful. But my religion! My holy orders!

Orou – They are mine, and I'm offering them to you. They are their own as well and give themselves up to you freely. Whatever purity of conscience is prescribed to you by that thing you call 'religion' and that thing you call 'holy orders', you may accept them without scruple. I am in no way exceeding my authority, and you may be sure that I know and respect the rights of individuals.

At this point the truthful chaplain acknowledges that Providence had never exposed him to such strong temptation. He was young, agitated, vexed. He averted his eyes from the delightful supplicants and then gazed at them again; he raised his eyes and hands to the heavens. Thia, the youngest, threw her arms around his knees and said to him, 'Stranger, do not make my father unhappy, nor my mother, nor me. Honour me in this hut and within my family. Lift me up to the status of my sisters, who make fun of me. Asto, the eldest, already has three children; Palli, the second, has two; but Thia has none. Stranger, good stranger, do not reject me. Make me a mother. Make me bear a child whom I can one day lead by the hand, by my side, in Tahiti, who in nine months' time will be seen suckling at my breast, who will make me proud and who will be a part of my dowry, when I pass from my father's hut to another. I may be more fortunate with you than with our young Tahitians. If you grant me this favour, I

shall never forget you. I shall bless you all my life; I shall write your name on my arm and on that of your son. We shall forever utter it with joy; and when you leave these shores my prayers will accompany you across the seas, until you reach your own land.'

The artless chaplain says that she clasped his hands, that she fastened her eyes on his with glances so touching and expressive that she wept, that her father, mother and sisters withdrew, that he remained alone with her, and that, still calling out 'But my religion, but my holy orders', he found himself at dawn lying beside this young girl who overwhelmed him with caresses and who invited her father, mother and sisters, when in the morning they came to his bed, to add their own gratitude to hers.

Asto and Palli, after withdrawing for a time, returned with native food, drinks and fruits. They embraced their sister and wished her good fortune. They breakfasted together; then Orou remained alone with the chaplain and said to him, 'I see that my daughter is pleased with you, and I thank you. But could you tell me just what is the meaning of the word "religion" which you have expressed so many times and with such sadness?'

{The chaplain, after reflecting for a moment, replied,} 'Who made your hut and all the things that furnish it?'

Orou - I did.

The chaplain - Well, we think that this world and everything in it is the work of one craftsman.

Orou - Does he then have feet, hands, a head?

The chaplain - No.

Orou - Where does he live?

The chaplain - Everywhere.

Orou - Here, even?

The chaplain - Here.

Orou - We have never seen him.

The chaplain - He cannot be seen.

Orou - What a pretty poor father. He must be aged, because he must be at least as old as what he's made.

The chaplain - He never grows old. He spoke to our ancestors; he gave them laws; he prescribed the way he wished to be honoured; he ordained that certain actions were good and forbade others as evil.

Orou - I understand. And one of those actions he forbade as evil is to lie with a woman or girl. But why then did he make two sexes?

The chaplain – So that they may be united, but subject to certain conditions, following preliminary ceremonies, by virtue of which a man belongs to a woman and only to her; and a woman belongs to a man and only to him.

Orou – For as long as they live?

The chaplain – For as long as they live.

Orou – So that if a woman should happen to lie with someone other than her husband, or a husband should lie with someone other than his wife . . . But that doesn't happen, since he's there and whatever displeases him he knows how to stop.

The chaplain – No, he lets them do it, and so they sin against the law of God, for that is the name we give to the great craftsman. Against the law of the country what we commit is a crime.

Orou – I should be sorry to offend you by what I say, but if you'll permit me, let me tell you what I think.

The chaplain – Speak.

Orou – I find these strange precepts contrary to Nature, an offence against reason, certain to breed crime and bound to exasperate at every turn the old craftsman who, without a head, hand or tools has made everything; and who is everywhere but nowhere to be seen; who exists today and endures tomorrow without ever ageing a single moment; who commands and is not obeyed; who does not prevent occurrences which it is in his power to stop. Contrary to Nature, because they assume that a being which feels, thinks and is free may be the property of another being like himself. On what could such a right be based? Don't you see that in your country you have confused something which cannot feel or think or desire or will; which one takes or leaves, keeps or sells, without it suffering or complaining, with a very different thing that cannot be exchanged or acquired; which *does* have freedom, will, desire; which has the ability to give itself up or hold itself back forever; which complains and suffers; and which can never be an article of exchange unless its character is forgotten and violence is done to its nature. Such rules are contrary to the general order of things. What could seem more ridiculous than a precept which forbids any change of our affections, which commands that we show a constancy of which we're not capable, which violates the nature and liberty of male and female alike in chaining them to one another for the whole of their lives? What could be more absurd than a fidelity restricting the most capricious of our pleasures to a

single individual; than a vow of immutability taken by two beings formed of flesh and blood, under a sky that doesn't remain fixed for an instant, beneath caverns poised on the edge of collapse, under a cliff crumbling into dust, at the foot of a tree shedding its bark, beneath a quivering stone? Believe you me, you have made the plight of man worse than that of an animal. I've no understanding of your great craftsman, but I rejoice in his never having addressed our forefathers, and I hope he will never speak to our children; for he might by chance tell them the same nonsense, and they might commit the folly of believing him.

Yesterday at supper you talked to us about magistrates and priests. I don't know what you mean by 'magistrates' and 'priests', who have the authority to regulate your conduct, but tell me, are they masters of good and evil? Can they make what is just unjust, and transform what is unjust into what's just? Can they make harmful actions good, and innocent and useful ones evil? One would hardly think so, since nothing could then be true or false, good or evil, beautiful or ugly, unless it pleased your great craftsman and his magistrates and priests to deem them so; in which case you'd be obliged, from one moment to another, to change your beliefs and conduct. One day, on behalf of one of your three masters you'd be told, 'Kill', and you'd then be obliged in conscience to kill; another day, 'Steal', and you'd then have to steal; or 'Do not eat this fruit', and you wouldn't dare eat it; 'I forbid you this plant or animal', and you'd refrain from touching them. There's nothing good that couldn't be forbidden, nothing evil that might not be required of you. And where would you be if your three masters, out of sorts with one another, took it upon themselves to permit you, command you, and forbid you the very same thing, as I suspect must happen often? Then, to please the priest, you'll be forced to oppose the magistrate; to satisfy the magistrate, you'll be forced to displease the great craftsman; (and to satisfy the great craftsman,) you'll have to abandon Nature. And do you know what will happen then? You'll come to despise all three of them, and you'll be neither a man, nor a citizen, nor a true believer. You'll be nothing. You'll be out of favour with each form of authority, at odds with yourself, malicious, tormented by your heart, miserable and persecuted by your senseless masters, as I saw you yesterday when I offered my daughters (and wife) to you, and you cried out, 'But my religion; but my holy orders!'

Would you like to know what's good and what's bad at all times and in all places? Stick to the nature of things and of actions, to your relations with your fellow-man, to the effect of your conduct on your own well-being and on the general welfare. You're mad if you suppose there can be anything high or low in the universe which can add to or take away from the laws of Nature. Her eternal will is that good should be preferred to evil and the general good to the particular. You may decree the opposite, but you will not be obeyed. You will merely breed rascals and wretches, inspired by fear, punishment and remorse, depraving their conscience, corrupting their character. People will no longer know what they should do and what they should avoid. Anxious when innocent, calm only in crime, they will have lost sight of the pole star which should have guided their way. Answer me truthfully. Despite the express commands of your three legislators, doesn't a young man in your country ever lie with a young woman without their permission?

The chaplain – I should be lying if I assured you this never happens.

Orou – Doesn't the woman who has sworn to belong to her husband give herself to another?

The chaplain – Nothing is more common.

Orou – Your legislators must be either severe in meting out punishment, or not severe. If severe, they're wild beasts fighting against nature. If not severe, they're imbeciles whose useless prohibitions have subjected their authority to scorn.

The chaplain – Culprits who escape the severity of the laws are punished by public censure.

Orou – This amounts to saying that justice is administered without benefit of the whole nation's common sense, and that in place of laws you adopt the folly of opinion.

The chaplain – A girl who's lost her honour can no longer find a husband.

Orou – Lost her honour! Why?

The chaplain – An unfaithful woman is more or less despised.

Orou – Despised! And why?

The chaplain – The young man is called a cowardly seducer.

Orou – A coward, a seducer! And why?

The chaplain – The father, mother and poor child are disconsolate. The unfaithful husband is a libertine. The betrayed husband shares the shame of his wife.

Orou – What a monstrous web of delirium you describe, and yet you've not told me everything. For as soon as it's permitted to settle ideas of justice and property according to one's fancy, to ascribe or strike out the traits of things as if they were arbitrary, to attribute or deny good and evil to actions on no other grounds than whim, each person blames, accuses, suspects another; everyone tramples upon each other, becomes envious, jealous, deceitful, distressed, secretive, covert, spying upon another to take him or her by surprise; everyone quarrels and lies. Daughters deceive their parents, husbands cheat their wives, wives their husbands. Daughters – yes, I'm sure of it – will suffocate their children, suspicious fathers will scorn and neglect theirs, mothers will abandon them and leave them to the mercy of fate, and the crime of debauchery will appear in every shape and form. I know all this as plainly as if I'd lived among you. It's just so because it could not be otherwise; and the society whose splendid order your leader acclaims will be nothing but a swarm of hypocrites who secretly trample on the laws, or unfortunates who are themselves the willing instruments of their own torture; or imbeciles in whom prejudice has altogether stifled the voice of Nature; or misshapen creatures in whom Nature does not lay claim to her rights.

The chaplain – It's a fair likeness. But do you therefore never marry?

Orou – We marry.

The chaplain – What does your marriage consist of?

Orou – A mutual consent to live in the same hut and to share the same bed, for as long as we find it good to do so.

The chaplain – And when you come to find it bad?

Orou – We separate.

The chaplain – What becomes of the children?

Orou – Oh stranger! That last question reveals to me your country's depths of misery. You must understand, my friend, that here the birth of a child is always a source of joy, and a child's death an occasion for sorrow and tears. A child is a precious thing because it will grow up to be an adult. We thus have an interest in caring for it altogether different from that shown in our plants and animals. The birth of a child brings domestic and public joy. It will mean an increase of wealth for the hut, and of strength for the nation. It means another pair of arms and hands in Tahiti. We see in him a future farmer, fisherman, hunter, soldier, husband, father. In returning from her husband's hut to that of her parents, a woman brings back the chil-

dren she had taken with her as a dowry; those born during the companionship are shared, males and females equally, as far as possible, so that each parent has more or less the same number of boys and girls.

The chaplain – But children are a burden for many years before they can make themselves useful.

Orou – For their maintenance and that of the aged we set aside one part in six of all our harvests. This allowance always goes with them. So you see that the larger a Tahitian's family, the richer he is.

The chaplain – One part in six!

Orou – Yes. It encourages the growth of population and respect for the elderly and the welfare of children.

The chaplain – Do your husbands and wives sometimes take each other back?

Orou – Very often. The shortest length of a marriage, however, is one month.

The chaplain – Assuming, of course, that the mother's not with child; for then they must live together for at least nine months.

Orou – You're mistaken. The child's paternity, like its allowance, follows it everywhere.

The chaplain – You speak to me of children which a wife brings to her husband as a dowry.

Orou – Exactly. Take my eldest daughter here, who has three children. They can walk, they're healthy and attractive. They promise to be strong. When she comes to fancy getting married, she'll take them with her; they're hers. Her husband will accept them with joy and could only regard his wife as more dear to him if she were pregnant with a fourth.

The chaplain – By him?

Orou – By him or another. The more our girls have children, the more sought after they are. The more lusty and handsome our boys, the richer they are. Before they've reached the age of sexual maturity, we're careful to keep girls away from men, and boys from intercourse with women, but once they've passed puberty we exhort them to produce children. You can't imagine the importance of the service you will have rendered to my daughter Thia, if she's now with child. Her mother will no longer say to her each month, 'But Thia, what are you thinking of? You never get pregnant. You're nineteen years old;

you should already have two children, and you've none. Who will look after you? If you let your youth pass in this way, what will you do in your old age? Thia, there must be something wrong with you that puts men off. Cure yourself of it, my child. At your age, I'd already been a mother three times.'

The chaplain - What precautions do you take to safeguard your adolescent girls and boys?

Orou - That's the main object of domestic education, and the most important item of public morality. Up to the age of twenty-two, that is, two or three years past puberty, our boys wear a long tunic which covers them, their loins clasped by a little chain. Before they become nubile, our girls daren't go out without a white veil. To take off one's chain or remove one's veil is a wrong seldom committed, because we teach our children at an early age what harmful effects will follow. But as soon as the male has attained his full strength, when the symptoms of his virility appear durable, and when the frequent emission and quality of his seminal fluid confirm it; just when the young girl becomes languid, bored and sufficiently mature to feel passion, to inspire and satisfy it usefully; then the father unfastens his son's chain and cuts the nail of the middle finger of his right hand; while the mother removes her daughter's veil. The young man may henceforth seek a woman's favours and be sought out in turn himself; the woman may thereafter walk about freely, her face and breasts uncovered. She may accept or reject a man's caresses. We merely indicate in advance to the boy, which girls, and to the girl, which boys, they should prefer. The (day of) emancipation for a boy or girl is a great holiday. If it's a girl, the young men assemble round her hut the evening before, filling the air the whole night long with their singing and the sound of musical instruments. On the appointed day, she's led by her father and mother into an enclosure where there's dancing and exercises of jumping, wrestling and running. The naked man is displayed before her, from all sides and in all attitudes. If it's a boy, then the girls undertake to please and do the honours of the ceremony, presenting before his eyes the nude female body, without reserve or furtiveness. The rest of the ceremony is enacted on a bed of leaves, as you saw on your arrival here. At sunset the girl returns to her parents' hut or to the hut of the young man she's chosen, and she remains there as long as she pleases.

The chaplain – So is this ceremony a wedding-day or not?

Orou – Just so.

A – What's that I see there in the margin?

B – It's a note in which the good chaplain says that the parents' precepts on the boys' and girls' choices were full of common sense, and very acute and useful observations, but that he suppressed this catechism, which would have appeared intolerably licentious to people as corrupt and superficial as we are. He adds, nevertheless, that it wasn't without regret that he had deleted details which would have shown, in the first place, how far a nation that pursues an important objective can proceed in its investigations without the help of physics and anatomy; and, secondly, how different are ideas of beauty in a country where its forms reflect the pleasures of a moment, from such ideas in a nation that appreciates them for a more constant utility. In the latter, to be beautiful, a woman must have a striking complexion, a high forehead, large eyes, fine and delicate features, a slender waist, a small mouth, small hands and feet. In the former, almost none of these qualities matters. The woman who attracts admiring glances and is the object of desire is the one who promises many children, like the wife of Cardinal Ossat⁸ – children who will be active, intelligent, courageous, healthy and robust. The Venus of Athens and that of Tahiti have next to nothing in common. [One is *Vénus galante*, the other *Vénus féconde*.] A Tahitian woman one day said scornfully to another woman from her country, 'You are pretty; but you bear ugly children. I am ugly, but my children are beautiful, and the men prefer me.'

After this note by the chaplain, Orou continues:⁹

⁸ Arnaud d'Ossat (1536–1604), Bishop of Rennes, then of Bayeux, made Cardinal in 1599; minister of King Henri IV to the Holy See, responsible for persuading Pope Clement VIII to accept the Edict of Nantes; maligned by some commentators on account of his humble birth (he was orphaned) and suspected of having fathered a child, though not of having taken a wife.

⁹ The following digression devoted to Polly Baker appears only in the St Petersburg manuscript of this text and in the transcription made from that manuscript, now in the Fonds Vandeul. It was published for the first time in the *Frankfurter Zeitung* in 1912, and for the first time as part of the *Supplément* by Chinard in his edition of 1935. Reputedly drawn from Benjamin Franklin, the anecdote had appeared in both the *Gentleman's Magazine* and the *London Magazine* of 1747, and it was incorporated by Raynal in the

A – Before he goes on with his remarks, I wish to ask a favour of you, which is to remind me of something that happened in New England.

B – Here it is. A prostitute, Miss Polly Baker, on becoming pregnant for the fifth time, was brought before the Court of Justice of Connecticut, near Boston. The law condemns all women who become mothers only on account of their dissolute morals to a fine, or some form of corporal punishment when they cannot pay the fine. Miss Polly, on entering the Judges' Chambers, made the following address: 'Allow me, gentlemen, to address a few words to you. I am a poor and wretched woman, without means to pay lawyers for my defence, and I shall not detain you long. I do not flatter myself by supposing that in handing down your sentence you will deviate from the law. What I dare hope is that you will deign to petition the government on my behalf to relieve me of the fine. This is the fifth time, gentlemen, that I appear before you on the same charge. Twice I have paid heavy fines, twice I have suffered public and shameful punishment because I was unable to pay. That may be in accordance with the law; I don't dispute it. But sometimes there are unjust laws which can be rescinded and others which are too severe, whose enforcement may be suspended by the legislative power. I venture to say that the law by which I am condemned is in itself unjust and, against me, too harsh. I have never given offence to anyone in the place where I live, and I defy my enemies, if I have any, to prove that I have ever caused the slightest injury to a man, woman or child. Permit me for one moment to forget that this law exists, in which case I could not imagine what my crime might be. I have brought five handsome children into the world, at the risk of my own life; I nourished them with my own milk, I reared them through my own work, and I would have done more for them if I had not had to pay fines which deprived me of the means. Is it a crime to increase the number of His Majesty's subjects in a new country which lacks inhabitants? I took no husband away from his wife, nor led any young man into debauchery. Never have I been accused of such offences, and if there is any complaint against me, it can only be from the Minister whom I never paid for a marriage licence. But, I ask you, gentlemen, is that my fault? You must surely grant me enough good sense to accept that I would prefer the honour-

Histoire des Deux Indes, which was Diderot's source. Diderot himself probably had a hand in the revisions to it which figure in later editions of Raynal's work.

able status of wife over the shameful condition in which I have so far lived. I have always wished and still wish to get married, and I'm not embarrassed to say that I would display the good conduct, industry and thrift befitting a wife, no less than the fertility I have shown so far. I defy anyone to say that I have refused to enter wedlock. I accepted the first and only proposal ever made to me when I was still a virgin. I was foolish enough to entrust my honour to a man who had none. He gave me my first child and abandoned me. That man you all know; he is at present a magistrate like yourselves and sits on your bench. I had hoped that he would appear at this hearing today and that he would have enlisted your compassion on my behalf, as a woman whose misfortune is due only to him. In that case I should have been incapable of shaming him by recollecting what passed between us. Am I therefore wrong to complain today of the injustice of the law? The first cause of my waywardness, my seducer, has been graced with powers and honours, bestowed by the same government which punishes my misfortune with the lash and infamy. I shall be told that I have transgressed the precepts of religion. If my offence is against God, let Him take charge of my punishment. You have already excommunicated me from the Church; is that not enough? Why add to the torments of hell, which you think await me in the next world, those of fines and the lash? Forgive these remarks, gentlemen. I am not a theologian. But I can hardly believe it a dreadful crime to have brought into this world handsome children whom God has endowed with immortal souls and who love Him. If you make laws which change the nature of actions and render them criminal, make some against bachelors, whose number grows larger each day, who bring seduction and disgrace to families, who deceive young girls like me and compel them to live in the shameful state to which I have fallen, in the midst of a society which rejects and despises them. It is such men who disturb public tranquillity; theirs are the crimes which, unlike mine, really merit the censure of the law.'

This remarkable speech had the effect Miss Baker hoped for; her judges set aside the fine and the punishment which stands in for it. Her seducer, informed of what had happened, felt remorse for his behaviour and sought to make amends. Two days later he married Miss Baker and made an honest woman of the person whom five years earlier he had made a prostitute.

A – Isn't this just a tale you've fabricated?

B – No.

A – I'm glad to hear it.

B – I'm not sure whether the abbé Raynal doesn't also report the facts and statements in his *History of Trade in the Two Indies*.¹⁰

A – An excellent work, and one so different in tone from his previous writings that the abbé is suspected of having commissioned other hands.

B – That's an unjust charge.

A – Or simply mischievous. People will pluck out the laurel leaves which wreath a great man's brow until he is left with only a single leaf.

B – But time gathers them together again and restores the crown.

A – Yet once dead, having suffered the injury of his contemporaries, he cannot appreciate the reparation extended to him by posterity.¹¹

IV

Orou – What a happy moment for a young girl and her parents when it's discovered that she's with child! She leaps to her feet, runs and throws her arms round the neck of her mother and father. Beside herself with the delight of mutual joy she tells them the news, and so they learn of the happy event. 'Mother, dear father, kiss me. I am pregnant. – Is it really true? – Quite true. – And who got you with child? – So and so.'

The chaplain – How is she able to tell who's the father of her child?

Orou – Why shouldn't she know? Our love affairs are like our marriages. Each lasts from one moon to the next.

The chaplain – And is this rule strictly observed?

Orou – You can judge for yourself. First, the interval between two moons isn't long; but when two men have a plausible claim to be the father of a child it no longer belongs to its mother.

The chaplain – To whom does it belong then?

Orou – To whichever of the two the mother pleases to give it. That's her sole privilege. And since a child is in itself a source of benefit and

¹⁰ It appears in volume 8 of the *Histoire des Deux Indes*, under the rubric (Bk. 17, ch. xxi), 'Excessively harsh sentences which endure in New England even after the suppression of fanaticism.'

¹¹ End of the Polly Baker digression.

riches, you can understand why, among us, lascivious women are rare and young men keep away from them.

The chaplain – So you do have your loose women as well. I feel better for it.

Orou – We even have more than one kind, but that's another matter. When one of our daughters is pregnant, if the father of the child is a good-looking, well-built, brave, intelligent, industrious young man, the hope that it will inherit his qualities renews our joy. Our daughter is only ashamed of making a bad choice. You can understand what value we attach to health, beauty, strength, ingenuity and courage. You can imagine how, even without our interference, the prerogatives of blood are bound to be perpetuated among us. Since you've been in so many countries, tell me, have you ever seen more handsome men and more beautiful women than in Tahiti? Look at me. What do you think of me? Well, there are ten thousand men here who are taller than I am and just as strong, but there's not one as brave. That's why mothers often point me out to their daughters.

The chaplain – But of all the children you've sired outside your hut, how many come back to you?

Orou – A quarter, male or female. We have a circulation of men, women and children, of able-bodied persons of all ages and occupations, which is of far greater importance than the circulation of commodities, which are no more than the product of people's work.

The chaplain – I can understand that. What's the significance of those black veils I've noticed from time to time?

Orou – They're a mark of sterility, either a defect of birth or a consequence of old age. Any woman who takes off that veil and consorts with men is licentious, and so is a man who lifts it and has relations with such a woman.

The chaplain – And those grey veils?

Orou – They're the mark of a woman indisposed by her monthly period. Any woman who takes off that veil and consorts with men is licentious, and so is a man who lifts it and has relations with such a woman.

The chaplain – Have you punishments for such licentiousness?

Orou – Only public censure.

The chaplain – May a father lie with his daughter, a mother with her son, a brother with his sister, a husband with the wife of another man?

Orou – Why not?

The chaplain – To say nothing of fornication, but incest, adultery!

Orou – What do you mean by these words 'fornication', 'incest', 'adultery'?

The chaplain – Crimes, monstrous crimes, for which people are burnt to death in my country.

Orou – Whether or not people are burnt to death in your country matters little to me. You can't condemn the ways of Europe in the light of those of Tahiti, nor consequently the ways of Tahiti in the light of those of your country. We must have a more reliable standard, so what will that be? Do you know a better one than the general welfare and individual utility? Well, tell me, now, how your crime of incest is in conflict with these two aims of our actions? You're mistaken, my friend, if you suppose that once a law is published, a dishonourable word invented, a punishment determined, enough has been said. Tell me, then, what do you mean by 'incest'?

The chaplain – But to commit incest . . .

Orou – Yes, 'incest'. Has it been a long time since your great craftsman, without hands, head or tools, made the world?

The chaplain – No.

Orou – Did he make the whole human race at one time?

The chaplain – (No,) he only created one man and one woman.

Orou – Did they have children?

The chaplain – Certainly.

Orou – Suppose that these two original parents only had daughters and that their mother was the first to die. Or that they only had sons and that the wife lost her husband.

The chaplain – You embarrass me. But in spite of all your remarks, incest is a dreadful crime. Let's discuss something else.

Orou – That's easily said, but for my part I shall remain silent, until you've explained to me what this dreadful crime, 'incest', may be.

The chaplain – Very well then, I grant you that incest perhaps does not offend against nature, but isn't it enough to remark that it threatens the political order? How could a state be tranquil and its leader safe if a whole nation made up of several million people were to be split into fifty families, each centred on a different father?

Orou – At worst it would mean that instead of one great society there would be fifty small ones, more happiness overall and one less crime.

The chaplain – I suspect, nevertheless, that even here a son rarely lies with his mother.

Orou – Unless he has so much respect for her, and feels such tenderness, that he forgets the disparity of their ages and prefers a woman of forty to a girl of nineteen.

The chaplain – What about intercourse between fathers and daughters?

Orou – Hardly more frequent, unless the girl's ugly and little sought after by young men. If her father loves her, he takes responsibility for preparing her dowry in children.

The chaplain – This leads me to suppose that in Tahiti the fate of women on whom Nature has not smiled must be difficult.

Orou – Your remark convinces me that you don't have a high opinion of the generosity of our young people.

The chaplain – As for the union of brother and sister, I presume it must be very common.

Orou – And much approved.

The chaplain – To hear you say it, the same passion which produces so many crimes and evils among us would here be altogether innocent.

Orou – Stranger, you lack both judgement and memory. You lack judgement, since whenever something's forbidden there are always people who are tempted to do it and who in fact set about doing it. Your memory fails you, since you no longer recall what I've told you. We do have dissolute old women who go out at night without their black veils, receiving men whose advances can't prove fruitful. If they're recognised or found out, their punishment is either exile to the north of the island, or slavery. We have precocious girls who lift their white veils without their parents' knowledge; for them we reserve a locked corner of the hut. We have young men who remove their chain before the time prescribed by nature and by law; we reprimand their parents. We have women to whom the period of pregnancy seems too long; women and girls none too careful about wearing their grey veils. But, as a matter of fact, we attach no great importance to any of these lapses, and you'd hardly believe how much our morals are actually improved by the extent to which we're inclined to identify private and public gain with the growth of population.

The chaplain – But don't you ever have trouble stemming from the attraction of two men to the same woman or the longing of two women or girls for the same man?

Orou – I've scarcely seen four such examples. The woman's or man's

choice settles the matter. An act of violence committed by a man would be a serious offence; but the victim would have to make a public complaint, and it's almost unheard of for a woman or girl to do so. The only thing I've noticed is that our women are a little less considerate of unattractive men than our young men are of ill-favoured women, and that doesn't worry us at all.

The chaplain – From what I can see, there's hardly any jealousy here. But what about the powerful and delightful feelings of marital tenderness and paternal care? If these sentiments aren't unknown here, they must be rather weak.

Orou – In their place we've another which is altogether more general, energetic and durable: self-interest. Look candidly into your conscience and leave behind that sanctimonious bluster always foaming from the lips of your comrades but never to be found deep in their hearts; tell me if there's any country in the world in which a father, unless held back by shame, wouldn't rather lose his child, or a husband his wife, than accept the loss of his fortune and the comforts of his life. You can be sure that whenever a man is as attentive to his fellow-creatures as to his bed, health or peace of mind, his hut, harvests or fields, he will do his utmost to ensure their welfare. It's here that you will see tears shed over the bed of a sick child, and mothers nursed through illness. It's here that we prize a fruitful woman, a nubile girl, an adolescent boy. It's here that we take an interest in their upbringing, because in preserving them our fortune grows, while with their loss it is diminished.

The chaplain – I rather fear this savage is right. The wretched peasants of our countries wear out their wives to spare their horses, let their children perish without help and only call the doctor for their oxen.

Orou – I can't grasp what you've just said. But when you return to your country that's so civilised, try to introduce this motive there. Only then will the value of every newborn child, and the importance of population, be recognised. Shall I tell you a secret? Be sure to keep it to yourself. On your arrival, we let you have our wives and daughters. You showed surprise and such gratitude that we laughed. You thanked us for having placed on you and your companions the greatest of all impositions. We didn't ask you for money; we didn't loot your ships; we cared nothing for your produce; but our wives and daughters drew blood from your veins. When you've gone you will

have left children. Don't you think that this tribute seized from your person, from your very flesh, surpasses all others? And if you wish to judge its value, imagine that you had still two hundred leagues of coastline to navigate, and that every twenty miles the same tribute was collected from you. We've vast tracts of untilled soil; we lack hands and asked you for them. We've still to recover from calamitous epidemics, and we used you to make good the void they've left. We have nearby enemies to contend with, a need for soldiers, and we asked you to supply us with them. We have a surplus of women and girls over men, and so in our endeavours we enlisted your services. Among these women and girls there are some with whom we've never been able to beget children, and these are the ones we exposed to your first embraces. We're obliged to pay a tribute, in men, to a neighbouring oppressor; you and your comrades will pay off this debt for us, and in five or six years it will be your sons whom we send, if they're less hardy than ours. While more robust and healthy than you, we saw at once that you surpassed us in intelligence, and we immediately marked out for you some of our most beautiful women and girls to receive the seed of a race superior to ours. We tried an experiment which may still bring us success. We've drawn from you and yours the only part which we could take; and, rest assured, however savage we are, we know just how to scheme. Go wherever you will, and you'll almost always find a man as shrewd as yourself. He'll never give you anything but what's worthless to him, and will always ask you for what he finds useful. If he offers you a bit of gold for a bit of iron, it's because he thinks nothing of gold but cares highly for iron. But tell me, by the way, why you're not dressed like the others? What's the significance of this long robe which envelops you from head to foot, and the pointed sack which you let fall behind your shoulders, or which you pull up over your ears?

The chaplain – The reason I dress as I do is that I'm a member of a society of men which in my country is called monks. The most sacred of their vows is to refrain from sexual relations with a woman and to have no children.

Orou – What then do you do?

The chaplain – Nothing.

Orou – And your magistrates put up with that sort of idleness, the worst of all?

The chaplain – They do more; they respect it and see that others do so too.

Orou – My first thought was that Nature, some accident or cruel trick of fate, had deprived you of the ability to reproduce your kind, and that out of compassion you'd been allowed to live rather than been put to death. But, monk, my daughter told me that you are indeed a man, and one as robust as any Tahitian, and that she hoped that your repeated caresses wouldn't prove fruitless. Now that I understand why you cried out yesterday, 'But my religion! But my holy orders!', would you tell me the reason for the favour and respect which magistrates extend to you?

The chaplain – I don't know.

Orou – You must at least know why, as a man, you freely condemned yourself not to be one.

The chaplain – That would take too long and be too hard to explain to you.

Orou – And are monks always faithful to their vows of sterility?

The chaplain – No.

Orou – I thought not. Do you also have female monks?

The chaplain – Yes.

Orou – As wise as the male monks?

The chaplain – More strictly confined, they shrivel away from unhappiness and perish from boredom.

Orou – So that the injury done to Nature is avenged. Oh, what a wretched country! If everything there's managed the way you say, you're more barbarous than we are.

The good chaplain reports that he spent the rest of the day wandering about the island and viewing the huts; and that in the evening, after supper, when the father and mother implored him to lie with the second of their daughters, Palli offered herself to him in the same state of undress as Thia before; that during the night he cried out several times, 'But my religion! But my holy orders!'; that on the third night he was struck by the same remorse in the arms of Asto, the eldest; and that out of courtesy he granted the fourth night to the wife of his host.

A – I warn to this polite chaplain.

B – And I much more to the manners of the Tahitians and the remarks of Orou.

V

CONTINUATION OF THE DIALOGUE BETWEEN A AND B

A – Though they show a rather European influence.

B – I don't doubt it.

The good chaplain complains here of the brevity of his stay in Tahiti, and of the difficulty of coming to terms with the customs of a people wise enough to have stopped their development at an early stage, or happy enough to live in a climate under which the soil's fertility assures a long quiescence; a people sufficiently active to secure relief from life's basic needs, and sufficiently indolent to ensure that their innocence, tranquillity and contentment remain unperturbed by too rapid an advance of knowledge. Nothing there was deemed evil by sentiment or law apart from what was evil by nature. Work and harvesting were there undertaken in common. Their notion of property was very limited. The attraction of love, reduced to a simple physical appetite, gave rise among them to none of our disorders. The whole island seemed like one large family, in which every hut is like an apartment of one of our great houses. The chaplain concludes by declaring that these Tahitians will always be in his thoughts; that he was tempted to throw his vestments into the ship and pass the rest of his days among them; and that he fears he would often rue his failure to do so.

A – Despite such tribute, what useful consequences can be drawn from the manners and strange customs of these uncivilised people?

B – It seems to me that as soon as physical factors, such as the need to overcome the infertility of the soil, have brought man's ingenuity into play, the momentum drives him well beyond his immediate objective; so that when his need has elapsed he comes to be swept into the great ocean of fantasy from which he cannot pull out. May the happy Tahitian stop where he is! I can see that, except in this remote corner of the globe, there's never been any morality and perhaps never will be.

A – What do you mean by morality?

B – I mean a general obedience to laws, either good or bad, and such conduct as follows from that obedience. If the laws are good, morality is good. If the laws are bad, morality's bad. If the laws, either good or bad, are not observed, which is the worst condition possible for a

society, there are no morals. Now how do you suppose that the laws can be obeyed when they contradict one another? Study the history of epochs, and of nations old and new, and you'll find men subject to three codes of law – the natural code, the civil code and the religious code – which they're obliged to breach in turn, since these codes are never in agreement. From this it follows that there has never been in any country, as Orou guessed of ours, a true man, or a citizen or a pious believer.

A – From which you no doubt conclude that if morality were based on men's eternal relations with one another, religious law would be superfluous and civil law would merely articulate the law of nature.

B – Indeed, lest we breed evil instead of good.

A – Or, if it's judged necessary to retain all three, the last two should be strictly patterned on the first, which we carry with us engraved in our hearts, and which is always the strongest.

B – That's not quite right. We have no more in common with other human beings at birth than an organic similarity of form, the same need, an attraction to the same pleasures and a shared aversion to the same pains. These are the things which make man what he is, and which should form the basis of the morality suited to him.

A – That's not easily achieved.

B – It's so difficult, in fact, that I venture to guess that the most savage people on earth, the Tahitians, who have kept strictly to the law of nature, are nearer to having good laws than any civilised people.

A – Because it's easier to abandon one's excessively primitive ways than to retrace one's steps and reform one's abuses.

B – Especially those to do with the relations between man and woman.

A – Perhaps, but let's begin at the beginning. Let's put the question directly to Nature and, without prejudging the matter, hear her reply.

B – I agree.

A – Does marriage exist in nature?

B – If you mean by marriage the preference that one female shows for one male over all others, or that a male shows for one female over the rest, a shared preference by which they form a more or less durable union that perpetuates the species through the reproduction of individuals, then, yes, marriage exists in nature.

A – I agree with you, for this preference is evident not only in the human race, but also in other species of animals. Think of the host of

males pursuing the same female in our countryside each spring, only one of which is accepted as her mate. What about courtship?

B – If, by courtship, you mean that assortment of forceful and delicate measures which passion inspires, in either a male or a female, to win its preferred mate and so lead to the sweetest, most important and most general of pleasures, then, yes, courtship exists in nature.

A – I agree with you. Think of the variety of tender gestures made by the male to please the female, and by the female to excite the passion and secure the attention of the male. And flirtation?

B – That's just deception, which consists of simulating a passion one doesn't feel, and giving assurance of a preference that will not be extended at all. The male flirt sports with the female; the female flirt sports with the male – a game of duplicity which sometimes leads to the most dreadful catastrophes, a ridiculous manoeuvre in which deceiver and deceived alike are equally punished by the waste of the most precious moments of their lives.

A – So, in your view, flirtation doesn't exist in nature.

[B – I wouldn't say that.]

A – And devotion?

B – Nothing I can say about that would be better than what Orou told the chaplain. It's a vain delusion entertained by two children who don't understand themselves and whose ecstasy of a fleeting moment blinds them to the instability of everything around them.

A – And that rare phenomenon, fidelity?

B – In our countries, almost always the tortured obstinacy of decent men and women. A mere fantasy in Tahiti.

A – And jealousy?

B – [The passion of a poor and wretched creature with a sense of deprivation; in mankind] an unjust feeling, produced by our false moral standards and the extension of a right of property to a being that feels, thinks, wills and is free.

[A – So, in your view, jealousy does not exist in nature?

B – I wouldn't say that. Virtue and vice are all equally present in nature].

A – Gloom fills the jealous man.

B – Like the tyrant, because he's conscious of it.

A – And modesty?

B – You're engaging me in a course on the principles of seduction. A man doesn't wish to be disturbed or distracted while he pursues his

pleasures. Those of love are followed by a period of weakness which would expose him to the mercy of his enemies. Apart from this there's nothing natural in modesty; all the rest is convention. The chaplain remarks in a third fragment which I've not read to you that the Tahitian doesn't blush on account of an involuntary movement to which he's subject when aroused when near his wife, surrounded by his daughters; and that at the sight of such an occurrence the women are sometimes moved, but never flustered. It was only when a woman became the property of a man, and another man's furtive enjoyment came to be regarded as theft, that the terms 'modesty', 'discretion' and 'propriety' were born along with imaginary virtues and vices: in effect, those barriers between sexes which would hinder them from tempting one another to violate the laws imposed upon them, but which often produce an opposite effect, in stirring the imagination and exciting desire. When I see how we plant trees round our palaces, or how a woman's bodice at once hides and exposes her breast, I seem to detect a secret wish to return to the forest, a recollected longing for the freedom of our first habitat. The Tahitian would say to us, 'Why do you hide your body? What are you ashamed of? Is it wrong to submit to the most noble impulse of nature? Man, show yourself openly if you're attractive. Woman, if this man pleases you, receive him with the same candour.'

A – Don't get vexed. Even if we begin by behaving like civilised men, it's rare that we don't end like the Tahitian.

B – Perhaps, but the preliminaries required by convention consume the life of a man of genius.

A – Indeed, but so what, if by the same measure they hold back that pernicious impulse of the human spirit against which you were protesting a moment ago? When asked why it was that men courted women and not the other way round, a present-day philosopher replied that it was only natural for the request to be put to those who were always able to ensure that it was satisfied.

B – That explanation has always seemed to me more ingenious than sound. Immodest Nature, if you think her so, impels each sex towards the other with equal force, and in the bleak and savage state of man, which is so difficult to imagine and perhaps exists nowhere . . .

A – Not even in Tahiti?

B – No . . . the divide separating man from woman would be bridged by whichever was the more amorous. If one hesitates, if one flees, if

one pursues and the other escapes, if one attacks and the other resists, it's because passion is excited at a different pace in each and does not impel them with equal force. From which it follows that sexual desire is enflamed, consummated and extinguished in the one before it has scarcely begun to be aroused in the other, and both are disappointed. That's an accurate picture of what might come to pass between two young people, free and entirely lacking all artifice. But after a woman has learnt, through experience and education, what are the more or less cruel consequences of a moment's delight, her heart trembles at the approach of a man. The man's heart doesn't tremble. His senses command, and he obeys. The woman's senses make themselves plain to her, but she's afraid to listen to them. It's the man's task to make her forget her fears, to intoxicate her and seduce her. The man retains all his natural attraction to the woman; the attraction of the woman for the man, as a geometrician might say, is in direct proportion to her passion and in inverse proportion to her fear, a ratio complicated by a multitude of different elements in our societies, which nearly all conspire to increase the timidity of one sex and the duration of the other's pursuit. It's a kind of tactical struggle, in which the means of defence and those of attack have kept abreast. We exalt the woman's resistance, we revile the man's aggression – aggression which, however, would be no more than a trifling wrong in Tahiti, but becomes a crime in our cities.

A – But how has it come to pass that an act of such solemn purpose, and to which Nature beckons us by such a powerful attraction – that the deepest, sweetest and most innocent of pleasures – has become the most potent source of our evils and depravity?

B – Orou explained it ten times over to the chaplain. Listen once more to what he said, and try to remember it:

It's the tyranny of man which converted the possession of woman into property.

It's morals and customs which have encumbered the union of man and wife with too many conditions.

It's civil laws which have subjected marriage to endless formalities.

It's the nature of our society and the disparity of wealth and rank which have given rise to our proprieties and improprieties.

It's on account of a strange contradiction common to all existing societies, according to which the birth of a child, while always

regarded as adding to the wealth of the nation as a whole, more often and more certainly adds to the poverty of its family.

It's on account of the political views of sovereigns, who regard everything only in the light of their own interest and security.

It's on account of religious institutions, which have attached the names of vice and virtue to actions which were not susceptible of moral judgement.

How far we are from both nature and happiness! Yet nature's empire cannot be destroyed; whatever obstacles are put in its way, it will survive. Inscribe as much as you like, on tablets of bronze, that – if I may borrow the expression of the wise Marcus Aurelius – the sensual rubbing together of two intestines is a crime. The heart of man will only be torn between the threat of your inscription and the intensity of its desires. The untamed heart will never cease to crave, and a hundred times in the course of a lifetime your fearsome engraving will fade from our eyes. Chisel upon marble, 'Thou shalt not eat of either kite or vulture';¹² 'Thou shalt know only thy wife'; 'Thou shalt not take thy sister in marriage'¹³ . . . Of course, don't forget to increase the severity of punishments in accordance with the absurdity of your prescriptions. Cruel as you become, you'll never succeed in rooting out my nature.

A – How brief would be the codes of nations, if only they conformed rigorously to that of Nature! How many vices and errors would man have been spared!

B – Would you like a historical sketch of almost all our misery? Here it is. Once upon a time there was a natural man; inside him was introduced an artificial man, and within his breast there then broke out a continual war, lasting the whole of his life. Sometimes the natural man is stronger, sometimes he is laid low by artificial, moral man; in either case the miserable monster is racked, torn, tortured, stretched on the wheel, constantly groaning, ceaselessly wretched, whether moved to delirium by a false striving for glory or bowed down

¹² The text here reads 'Tu ne mangeras ni de l'ixon ni du griffon', an allusion to Deuteronomy 14:12 and 13: 'aqualim scilicet et grypem et alietum, ixon et vulturem'. Both the Latin and the original Hebrew are unclear. 'Ixon' has been variously rendered as 'vulture' or 'buzzard' instead of 'kite', and 'grypon' is sometimes transcribed not as 'vulture', but as the fabulous composite animal, 'griffin'.

¹³ Allusions to Leviticus 18:9 and 20.

and battered by misbegotten shame. Yet there are extreme circumstances which can still draw man back to his original simplicity.

A – Poverty and sickness, the two great exorcists.

B – Exactly so. For what then becomes of all those conventional virtues? In the grip of poverty, man knows no compunction; in sickness, woman is without shame.

A – So I've discerned.

[B – But another phenomenon, which will not have escaped your notice either, is that the return of artificial, moral man follows step by step the march of illness to convalescence, and convalescence to good health. The internecine war resumes the moment the infirmity ceases, and almost always to the disadvantage of the invader.

A – Quite so. I've myself experienced that, in convalescence, natural man possesses a deadly vigour in combat with artificial, moral man.] But, in a word, tell me: Is it better to civilise man or to allow him to follow his instinct?

B – Must you have a precise answer?

A – Absolutely.

B – If you propose to be his tyrant, civilise him; poison him as best you can with a morality contrary to nature. Shackle him in all possible ways. Obstruct his every step with a thousand obstacles. Encumber him with terrifying phantoms. Keep the war inside him perpetually enflamed, and make sure that natural man is always chained beneath the heel of moral man. Or would you rather he be happy and free? Then don't meddle in his affairs; there will be enough unforeseen incidents to lead him to enlightenment and depravity; and never allow yourself to forget that it's not for your sake but for theirs that wise lawgivers have moulded and shaped you as you are. I call to witness all political, civil and religious institutions. Examine them closely, and I should be much mistaken if, throughout the ages, you didn't find the human race broken under the yoke which a handful of scoundrels had determined to place upon it. [Beware of anyone who wishes to put matters right. To regulate is always to make oneself the master of others by obstructing them, and the Calabrians are practically the only people left who have not yet succumbed to the blandishments of legislators.

A – And does this anarchy of Calabria please you?

B – I appeal to experience and wager that their barbarism is less

depraved than our urbanity. How commonly do petty misdemeanours here make up for the atrocity of certain dreadful crimes which provoke such fuss! I regard uncivilised men as a multitude of coiled springs, scattered and isolated. No doubt if two were to collide, one or the other would break. To overcome this difficulty a person of profound wisdom and eminent genius assembled these springs into a mechanism; and within that mechanism known as society all the springs were set in motion, recoiling one against the other, endlessly under strain. More were broken in one day under this regime of law than in a year as a result of Nature's anarchy. But what a crash! What devastation! What shocking destruction of the little springs took place when two, three or four of these huge mechanisms clashed with force!

A – So you'd prefer the condition of crude and primitive nature?

B – For goodness sake, I wouldn't say that. But I know it has frequently been remarked that townsmen will cast aside everything and return to the forest, while no one has ever seen a man of the forest get dressed and come to settle in town.

A – I've often thought that the quantity of good and evil of each person was variable, but that the happiness or suffering of any animal species had a limit which it could not exceed; and that perhaps our endeavours brought us, in the end, as many disadvantages as benefits, so that we only tormented ourselves in order to augment the two halves of an equation between which there must always be a perpetual and necessary balance. Just the same, I don't doubt that the average lifespan of civilised man is longer than that of savage man.

B – And if the lifespan of a mechanism is not an accurate measure of its condition of wear, what would you conclude?

A – I see that, on the whole,] you'd be inclined to find men more wicked and miserable the more civilised they are.

B – Without enumerating all the countries in the world, let me just remark that nowhere but in Tahiti will you find the condition of man a happy one, nor is it elsewhere even tolerable, apart from in a little backwater of Europe. There, suspicious and jealous masters have been engaged in keeping man in what you call a state of brutishness.

A – Are you suggesting Venice?

B – Why not? At least you won't deny that enlightenment has made less progress there, that morals are less artificial, and vices and virtues are less chimerical, than anywhere else.

A – I didn't expect to hear praise of that government.

B – Nor am I offering any. I'm only pointing out a form of compensation for slavery which every traveller has noticed and commended.

A – What compensation!

B – Perhaps. The Greeks banished the man who added a string to Mercury's lyre.

A – And that proscription makes cruel mockery of their first legislators. They should instead have cut the first string.

B – You take my point. Whenever natural appetites become sophisticated, you can be sure there will be corrupt women.

A – Like La Reymer.

B – And dreadful men.

A – Like Gardeil.

B – And people who suffer for no good reason.

A – Like Tanier, Mademoiselle de la Chau, the chevalier Desroches and Madame de la Carlière.¹⁴ There's no doubt that in Tahiti one would search in vain for examples of the depravity of the first two and the misfortunes of the last three. What then shall we do? Return to nature? Submit to laws?

B – We must speak out against senseless laws until they're reformed and, in the meanwhile, abide by them. Anyone who on the strength of his own personal authority violates a bad law thereby authorises everyone else to violate the good. Less harm is suffered in being mad among madmen than in being wise on one's own. We should both tell ourselves and cry out incessantly that shame, punishment and dishonour have been administered for actions quite innocent in themselves; but let's not perform such actions ourselves, because shame, punishment and dishonour are the worst evils of all. Let's follow the good chaplain's example and be monks in France and savages in Tahiti.

A – Wear the costume of the country you visit, but keep your own clothes for the journey home.

B – And above all be most scrupulously honest and sincere with those frail creatures who can't delight us without sacrificing the most precious advantages of our societies. And now, what's become of the thick fog?

A – It's cleared.

¹⁴ The first four of these six characters are from Diderot's *Ceci n'est pas un conte*; the last two are from his *Madame de la Carlière*.

B – And shall we still be free after dinner to stay in or go out?

A – That depends, I guess, more on the women than on us.

B – Always it's women; you can scarcely take a step without running into them.

A – Perhaps we should read them the chaplain's conversation with Orou.

B – What do you suppose they might say about it?

A – I haven't a clue.

B – And what would they think of it?

A – Probably the opposite of what they say.

THE END

Observations sur le Nakaz

Editorial preface

Catherine's *Nakaz* was published in Russian in 1767 and in French in 1769. The work was translated into many European languages and was widely read, going through thirty editions in four years. A critical edition by M.D. Chechulin was published in St Petersburg in 1907. An English translation appears in W.F. Reddaway, *Documents of Catherine the Great* (Cambridge University Press, 1933).

Diderot began writing his *Observations sur le Nakaz* on his return journey from Russia in 1774. Another unpublished commentary was written by the physiocrat G.F. Le Trosne, under the title *L'Esprit de l'Instruction*, which has recently been rediscovered in St Petersburg by Georges Dulac. Diderot must have seen this work in 1775, before it was sent to Catherine, because he cites it and uses it as the basis of his discussion of physiocratic ideas in his *Observations*. From certain parallels between passages in the *Observations* and the third edition of the *Histoire des Deux Indes*, which Diderot was working on between 1777 and 1780, it seems that a final revision of the text must have taken place during those years.

After Diderot's death a copy of the work was sent to Catherine, together with other unpublished material and Diderot's library. Catherine reacted angrily to what she read and may have had the copy destroyed; no version of the work has been found in St Petersburg. Our knowledge of it derives from four manuscripts found in the Fonds Vandeul, of which two are virtual copies of the others. One had already been used for the first publication of the work in 1920 and that was also chosen by Paul Vernière for his edition in Diderot's *Œuvres politiques* (Paris, 1963); the text as printed by Vernière has been used for this translation. The other manuscript was used by Yves Benot in his edition of the *Textes politiques* (Paris,

1960) and by Roger Lewinter in his edition of *Œuvres complètes* (Paris, 1973); it has corrections and additions in Diderot's own hand, but seems to represent an earlier and therefore incomplete text. Georges Dulac has completed a new critical edition of the work, to appear as volume XXXI in the Hermann edition of *Œuvres complètes* (Paris, forthcoming). Editorial insertions to the text are given in square brackets [].

Observations on the Instruction of the Empress of Russia to the Deputies for the Making of the Laws

1

There is no true sovereign except the nation; there can be no true legislator except the people. It is rare that people submit sincerely to laws which have been imposed on them. But they will love the laws, respect, obey and protect them as their own achievement, if they are themselves the authors of them. The laws are then not the arbitrary wishes of one person, but the wishes of a number of men who have consulted one another about their happiness and security. The laws are useless if they do not apply equally to everyone; they are made in vain if there is a single member of society who can infringe them with impunity. The first point of a legal Code should therefore be to tell me about the precautions that have been taken to ensure that the laws have authority.

The first line of a well-made Code should bind the sovereign. It should begin thus: 'We the people and we sovereign of this people swear conjointly to obey these laws by which we will be equally judged; and if it should happen that we, the sovereign, enemy of our people, should change them or infringe them, it is just that our people should be released from the oath of loyalty, and that they should pursue us, depose us and even condemn us to death if the case demands it.'

As the authority of the sovereign alone makes the law feared, this oath must be sworn by the people and the sovereign as each law is made; and on the original text and on the published copies it must be

recorded formally that this oath has been sworn. Any sovereign who refuses this oath declares himself in advance to be a despot and a tyrant.

The second law is that the representatives of the nation should assemble every five years to judge if the sovereign has acted in conformity with any law to which he has sworn, to decide on the punishment he deserves if he has infringed it, to allow him to continue or to depose him, and to swear allegiance again to these laws, the oath for which shall be recorded formally.

People, if you have supreme authority over your sovereign, make a Code; if your sovereign has supreme authority over you, abandon your Code. You will be forging chains for yourselves alone.

II

After this preliminary rule, the second point about which the Code should inform me is the kind of government the nation has chosen.

The Empress of Russia is certainly a despot. Is it her intention to maintain the despotism and transfer it to her successors, or to abdicate it? If she maintains the despotism for herself and her successors, let her make her Code as she pleases; she only has to announce it to her nation. If she abdicates it, her abdication should be formal. If this abdication is sincere, she should concern herself with establishing, together with her nation, the surest way of preventing the re-emergence of despotism. In the first chapter we should read of the inevitable overthrow of anyone who in the future aims to win the arbitrary authority which she has discarded. These are the first steps of an Instruction proposed to the people by a sovereign of good faith, as great and as much an enemy of tyranny as is Catherine II.

If in reading what I have just written and in listening to her conscience, her heart beats with joy, then she no longer wants slaves. If she trembles, feels weak and goes pale, then she has taken herself for a better person than she really is.

III

One question for discussion is whether the political institutions should be put under the sanction of religion. In the acts of sovereignty I do not like to include people who preach of the existence of a being

superior to the sovereign, and who attribute to that being whatever pleases them. I do not like to make a matter of reason into one of fanaticism. I do not like to make a matter of conviction into one of faith. I do not like to give weight and consideration to those who speak in the name of the Almighty. Religion is a buttress which always ends up bringing the house down.

The distance between the throne and the altar can never be too great. In all times and places experience has shown the danger of the altar being next to the throne.

Priests are even more unreliable than magistrates as keepers of the laws. Nowhere in the world has it been possible without violence to reduce them to the pure and simple status of a citizen. Often they have had the nerve to say, as they have never ceased to think, that they were answerable only to God. Everywhere they have claimed a special jurisdiction, everywhere they have maintained the right to make or break an oath. To permit them that right is to give in to their claims. One cannot have too low an opinion of a race of men who sanctify crime when it pleases them. One cannot be too mistrustful of a race of men who alone have kept the royal privilege of speaking to the assembled people, in the name of the Lord of the universe.

A wise and enlightened policy would rigorously prescribe to such men what they could say in public, with the severest penalties if they transgressed. No disorders in society are worse than those where the troublemakers can use the pretext of religion, and make use of it to cloak their ambitions.

People who have been frequently oppressed are accustomed to look to the priests as their protectors, for they intercede on their behalf to God, the only avenger of the oppression of kings.

Sooner or later the throne is occupied by a superstitious person; that is to say, sooner or later the reign of the priests begins. And it is then that the people are supremely unfortunate.

The priest's system is a tissue of absurdities. Secretly, he tends to foster ignorance. Reason is the enemy of faith, and faith is the foundation of the status and fortune of priests, and of respect for them.

In the eyes of the people the priest is a sacred person. The monarch's interest and safety demand that this attribute be taken away from him. The more holy the priest, the more dangerous. The policy of Venice is to favour the corruption of the priests. The corrup-

ted priest can do nothing; he has lost his value. A policy has not provided for the peace of society if it has neglected that which the people regard with more importance than their own life.

Wicked kings need cruel gods in order to find an example of tyranny in heaven; they need priests so as to have tyrannical gods worshipped. But the just and free man only asks for a God who may be his father, for equals who cherish him, and for laws which protect him.

Catherine and Montesquieu began their works by referring to God. They would have done better to begin with the necessity of laws, which are the foundations of human happiness, and with the contract which is the basis of our liberty and property. For both of them, mention of God was a matter of policy. The need for such a policy should have made them aware of the evil, and inspired them with a fear of increasing it.

Far from giving this mark of distinction to religion and to the position of priests, I would have been inclined to place them among the common ranks of society, to make them subjects like everyone else. Their true place, roughly, was above or below that of an actor. Would you have dared to give them that place in an Instruction for a Code addressed to a nation? No, but I would have taken great care not to name them first. At the outset, I would have spoken of myself; then of the military, then of the magistracy, then of the different classes of subjects among which the priest would have appeared, before or after the merchant.

No man of reasonable intelligence, casting an impartial eye over all the religions of the earth, would fail to see in them a tissue of extravagant lies, a system with the following order of ranks: God, the priesthood, the royalty, the people. Can a sovereign agree to such an order? Even in a democratic state religion causes harm. Suppress as much as you can a system of lies which will suppress you. It is to you, sovereigns, that I say this.

A vice common to all groups is that of aiming at pre-eminence. This vice is less concealed, more violent and dangerous in the priesthood than among any other group.

Woe to the people when the priest is charged with the instruction of the young king. He raises him for God, that is to say, for himself. What are the two principles which he inculcates above all? First, the

denial of his reason, the profound submission to religion; second, intolerance and his complete independence of every kind of authority, except that of God. Everything the priest says (in a hundred different ways) comes down to these words: you are nothing before God, you are the absolute master of the people, excluding the priest.

The *philosophe* says much against the priest; the priest says much against the *philosophe*. But the *philosophe* has never killed priests, and the priest has killed many *philosophes*; the *philosophe* has never killed kings, and the priest has killed many kings. It was said of the Jesuits that every one of them was a dagger whose handle was in the hand of the general. It could be said with at least as much truth that each priest is a dagger whose handle is in the hand of God; or rather, that God is a dagger whose handle is in the hand of each priest. But let us be truthful: why is it that the *philosophes* have not killed priests and kings? It is because they have neither confessionals nor public pulpits; it is because they do not secretly seduce, nor preach to the assembled people. Sometimes they are fanatical. But their fanaticism does not have a sacred character; they speak not in the name of God, but in the name of Reason, which does not always speak coldly, but is always listened to coldly. And the *philosophes* do not promise paradise, nor threaten hell.

IV

*Russia is a European power.*¹ It matters little whether it is Asiatic or European. The important point is that it should be great, flourishing and lasting.

Manners [*mœurs*] are everywhere the result of legislation and government; they are not African or Asiatic or European. They are good or bad. You are a slave under the Pole where it is very cold, and a slave in Constantinople where it is very hot; but everywhere a people should be educated, free and virtuous. If what Peter I brought to Russia was good in Europe, then it should be good everywhere.

Without denying the influence of climate on manners, it is clear from the current condition of Greece and Italy, and it will be clear from the future condition of Russia, that good or bad *mœurs* stem

¹ Unless otherwise stated, words in italics are quotations from the *Nakaz*.

from other causes. Those Scythians so jealous of their freedom, if they still existed, would occupy some provinces which were either Russian or next to Russia.

The Russian empire occupies an area of 32 degrees in latitude and 165 degrees in longitude. To civilise such an enormous country, all at once, seems to me a project beyond human capacity, especially when I travel along the border and find here desert, there ice, and elsewhere all kinds of barbarian.

One thing which seems to me very wise to do first would be to put the capital in the centre.² The heart is badly situated at the tip of a finger. Once the capital is in the centre, then the highways would spread from there, communicating with all parts of the empire: the homes of the great on their land, the entrepôts of goods, the cross-country routes. The capital is a huge, voracious animal which continually consumes and gives nothing in return. Frontier towns are by their nature ramparts or places of defence and exchange.

The second thing would be to select someone who was not distinguished either by birth or wealth, put him in charge of a district, and make him carry out there a sensibly worked-out plan of civilisation which would serve as a model for all the other districts. To achieve this, the governor would have to be resolute, wise and informed; he should be free of all legal restraints and answer only to the sovereign for what he did. In relation to the rest of the empire, this district would be what France is in Europe in relation to the countries which surround her. It would soon become the law. If, in the whole of her reign, the Empress were to civilise only this district, she would have achieved a great deal.

The third thing would be to introduce a colony of Swiss people, and situate it in a suitable region. Guarantee it privileges and freedom, and grant the same privileges and freedom to all subjects who entered this colony. The Swiss are farmers and soldiers; they are loyal. I know by heart all the objections that can be raised against these methods; they are so frivolous that I shall not take the trouble to reply to them.

A plan of administration could be the product of wisdom itself, which the most comprehensive interest could have dictated. But even

² In order to facilitate trade and communication with Western Europe, and to break with the past, Peter the Great had moved the capital to the newly created city of St Petersburg.

though its success could be mathematically demonstrated, it would not be possible to execute it. Why is that? Because it has not come from the head of a native and presupposes the contribution of foreigners. Men are blind and push away light from outside. In monarchical states one way of excluding an able person from an important place (a way that hate or jealousy seldom fails to use), is to have the popular choice nominated before that of the court. The same method would succeed just as certainly among courts themselves. To turn a minister away from a good project, another minister would only have to win the glory of having been the first to think of it, and reveal that, to prevent it from being carried out. Nothing is rarer among ministers of a court than to see a citizen who is great, honest and good enough to continue a project begun by his predecessor. In this way abuses go on forever in a single nation. In this way everything is begun and nothing is completed, the result of a stupid pride whose fatal influence is spread through every branch of the administration. It halts the progress of civilisation and would have left people in a barbarous state if their leaders had constantly and at all times been equally possessed by it. But Her Imperial Majesty does not allow one to speak ill of those whom she calls her friends, so let us be silent.

V

It is clear that in a well-ordered society the wicked man cannot harm society without harming himself.

The wicked man knows that; but he knows still better that he gains more as a wicked man than he loses as a member of a society he harms.

‘Do you think that the farmers-general in France always felt that they were harming themselves, in harming society? Did they give up their positions?’ No.

The great problem needing solution is to ensure that the harm you do to society should always be less than that which you do to yourself. And how is this problem solved? There is and always will be some circumstance from which a wicked man can profit, in which there is no relation between the good he gains as a wicked man and the harm he does himself as citizen.

The principle in question applies rigorously to the sovereign, by virtue of the fact that he is master of everything and that it is impos-

ible for his wickedness to make him poor. But it is not the same with individuals. Consequently, there is no bad law which does not lead in the end to this result: *So it is your wish, Sire, that we should burn our harvests.*

Yet here is a difficulty. Natural laws are eternal and universal; positive laws are only the corollaries of natural laws. Therefore, positive laws are eternal and universal. Nevertheless, a particular positive law is certainly good and useful in one circumstance, bad and harmful in another. And there is certainly no Code which does not need to be reformed in time. This difficulty is perhaps not insoluble; but it must be solved.

VI

It is more advantageous to obey the laws under a single master than to depend on several masters.

I agree, provided that the master is the first subject of the laws. It is against this master, the most powerful and dangerous of wrongdoers, that laws should be mainly directed. Other malefactors can disturb the social order, but only he can overthrow it. There is only one palace in an empire, there are hundreds of millions of houses around that palace. For each occasion that the qualities which make a great king – common sense, magnanimity, fairness, resolution and genius – fall from heaven onto this palace, there must be a hundred million other times when they fall to the side. Therefore, according to a law of nature which we cannot alter, we should expect to be governed by an idiot, an evil man or a madman. If this difficulty has not been catered for, nothing has been achieved.

VII

The aim and purpose of every government should be to ensure the happiness of the citizens, the strength and magnificence of the state, and the glory of the sovereign. It is not necessary to ask what is the aim of an absolute government. Its aim scarcely matters, but what is its effect? That of putting all liberty and property in absolute dependence on a single person.

If this master is a just, enlightened, resolute man, all will be directed – at least throughout his reign – to the greatest good of all. But

this greatest good presupposes these three qualities together; if he is just without being informed or resolute, either he will do nothing or he will only do stupid things; and likewise with the lack of justice or resolution or intelligence. But if it is rare to find one of these qualities on its own, prominent in one person, how much rarer is it to find all three prominent together?

If, therefore, the size of Russia demands a despot, Russia is condemned to be twenty times badly governed for each time she is well governed. If, by one of those rare prodigies of nature, she had three good despots in a row, that would be an even greater misfortune for her, and for every other nation where submission to tyranny was not habitual.

For these three excellent despots would accustom the nation to blind obedience. During their reigns the people would forget their inalienable rights; they would fall into a fatal security and apathy; they would no longer experience that continual alarm that is necessary for the preservation of freedom. The absolute power which in the hands of a good master did so much good, would be transmitted by the last of these good masters to a wicked man; and it would be transmitted with the seal of time and usage. So all would be lost.

I said to the Empress that if England had had three sovereigns like Elizabeth, she would have been enslaved for centuries. And the Empress replied, 'I believe it.'

In any country whatsoever the sovereign authority should therefore be limited, and limited in a lasting way. The difficult problem to solve is, therefore, not that of giving laws, or even good laws, to a people; it is that of protecting these laws from any attack on the part of the sovereign.

The heroic action of a good despot is to bind one arm of his successor. That is the first question to propose to the commission.

VIII

In the natural order of things there are twenty madmen for each wise one. A good government, therefore, would be one in which the freedom of individuals was least restricted, and the freedom of the sovereign was restricted as much as possible.

Why is Russia less well-governed than France? It is because there the natural freedom of the individual is reduced to nothing and

sovereign authority is unlimited. Why is France less well governed than England? It is because its sovereign authority is still too great and natural liberty is still too restricted. When I pointed this out to the Empress, she said, 'Your advice then would be that I should have a Parliament like the English one.' I answered, 'If Your Imperial Majesty could create it with a wave of a wand, I think it would exist tomorrow.'

I see only a formal difference between despotism and pure monarchy. The despot does what he wants, without formality. The monarch is subjected to formalities which he neglects whenever he wants and which, when he does respect them, only delay the fulfilment of his wishes.

It is the spirit of pure monarchy which has dictated the Instruction of Catherine II. Pure monarchy stays as it is or reverts to despotism, according to the character of the monarch. It is therefore a bad kind of government.

The government under which the sovereign is free to do good, and restrained from doing harm, is called limited monarchy. But it may be asked, is it necessary to go in sequence from despotism to pure monarchy, and from pure to limited monarchy. I do not think so. A sovereign who is just, resolute and enlightened, and who can do everything, should leave nothing to be done by successors who will be more inclined to go back from limited monarchy to pure monarchy; that is the experience of all centuries and nations. The king of England does all he can to establish a French government; and the king of France all he can to introduce an Asiatic government.

I had the temerity to tell the Empress that there was an illness to which sovereigns were especially prone – namely, madness; and she agreed, without taking offence. To her one can really speak the truth; she is the true wife of Henri IV.³

IX

The sovereign is the source of all political and civil power.

I do not understand that. The consent of the nation, represented by deputies or assembled in corporate bodies, seems to me the source of all political and civil power.

³ Henri IV, King of France (1589–1610), was famous for his statesmanlike qualities.

It is a result of this tyrannical idea that a sovereign concludes every edict with that strange formula: *For such is our good pleasure*. Have we not learnt long enough from experience that the good pleasure of sovereigns is to crush their people?

The Empress of Russia, in discarding her prerogative as legislator in favour of her subjects, and allowing them to make laws for themselves, could end her decree with a more reasonable formula: *For such is the good pleasure of our people*.

X

Freedom exists in democracies. The spirit of freedom can be found in monarchies, but its mechanism is very different. Nevertheless, it is precisely when the spirit is missing that freedom itself must be preserved. A people must either be free, or believe that it is free. The person who destroys this national illusion is a criminal. The illusion is a vast spider's web on which the image of freedom is painted. This image fascinates the eyes of the people; it inspires them, sustains them, delights them. Some sharp eyes see, through the holes of the web, the hideous head of the despot. But what does the person who destroys the web accomplish? Nothing for the master whose abject slave he is, and an incurable evil for the people whom he disabuses, saddens, shatters, and degrades, by suddenly showing them the hideous head. The body to which the fundamental laws of the state are entrusted [*le corps dépositaire*] is that spider's web.

XI

If the *corps dépositaire* is subordinated to, and dependent upon, the supreme power, all legislation is made in vain.

I see no more than a will which rules everything, and which decides as it chooses on what is just or unjust. You may give whatever name you like to this will. In fact, it will never be anything but an Oriental despot.

XII

[Diderot argues against the physiocratic idea that the mere dissemination of evidence, in support of a well-argued economic or political policy, will achieve good results.]

I do not deny the good effect of the evidence, which should follow the general Instruction, but I have doubts about how effective it is as a counter-force.

1. How is this evidence made generally known? Nineteen-twentieths of a nation are condemned to ignorance by their condition and their stupidity.
2. The other twentieth, which at the moment is very enlightened, is ineffectual.
3. The evidence prevents neither the play of interest nor that of the passions. A dissolute merchant sees clearly that he is ruining himself, and does not thereby do himself any less harm. A sovereign will be aware that either personally or through his ministers he is being tyrannical; but that does not make him less so. Is it the evidence which has been in short supply in France under the last king?
4. Experience has shown that under enlightened rulers people write and speak well, but that only under good kings do things actually proceed well.
5. We certainly know more than people knew under Sully and Henri IV. Why are we less happy?
6. There seems to me little merit in the objections made to physical counter-forces watching over the sovereign authority. Take the Parliament of England, for example, which seems an awesome counter-force to the power of the king. If you exclude any representative who has been not just accused but convicted of bribery, and if you allow the people complete freedom of choice, then you will see what that counter-force will become. Not led astray by gifts, the people will certainly nominate the most upright and informed person. When you are neither blinded nor misled, it is natural to listen to your own interest.

For all that, we should enlighten and instruct; but we should not expect too much from this.

Moreover, I do not think that the evidence or any other method can make laws immutable. I think of them as abandoned to the vagaries of circumstances ~ not all of them, but at least some. The current situation of a state inspires a very wise law; and that law, reflecting the circumstances, would be very harmful if the situation were to change.

XIII

It would be pertinent to fix the rights of the *intermediary powers* and do so in a way that cannot be revoked even by the legislator or his successors. If these powers are dependent on the supreme power they are nothing. A free people only differs from one that is enslaved by the permanence of certain privileges which belong to man as man; to each order of citizens, as members of that order, and to each citizen as a member of that society. Where the sovereign disposes as he pleases of rights and laws, neither rights nor laws nor liberty exist. A fair-minded legislator concerned to do good has worked in vain if the person to whom the sceptre is transferred can overturn everything. To tie your own hands and those of your successor is the height of heroism, humanity and love of your subjects. It is one of the most difficult things in legislation. I know only three or four ways of achieving it: public knowledge or instruction, the brevity of the Code and law, education, the national oath, and the periodic assembly of the Estates General; but, above all, education and the enjoyment [of rights and laws] confirmed over a long period of time.

XIV

Are there fundamental laws in a state wherever the intermediary powers are only considered as *channels for transmitting the power of the sovereign*? I do not like this way of looking at things; it has a whiff of despotism which displeases me.

But there are indeed fundamental laws in a state wherever there are channels which transmit the common interest and the general will to the sovereign, and where these channels cannot be flooded by gold nor breached by the sovereign.

Without such preliminaries I will never see anything on the surface of the earth except slaves under different names.

XV

Laws which permit representations, which specify which social orders may make them, which fix the manner of their execution, etc., do not make the constitution of a state unshakeable. Take the case of France. She had

all these advantages, and a single moment turned her constitution upside down.

You have done nothing until you have found the secret of keeping the stupid, bad or mad child in bonds. During the reign of an evil sovereign the nation is in a state of war with the person who governs it. The more bad reigns there are, the longer this state of war has lasted. Little by little a nation grows accustomed to regard its master as its enemy.

The first word of all those who mount the throne is *Let there be peace between my people and myself*. One after another they have all exclaimed it, and we are still waiting for the one who will keep his word; he will be the Messiah. People, do not rush to say, 'Here he is, he has arrived.' Wait for the miracles which should make his arrival manifest.

Make representations! What use are representations? Did our magistrates not do that? Did they not refuse to register those wishes of the sovereign which seemed to them contrary to the laws and good of the nation? Were they not authorised in this refusal by the most precise injunction of several of our kings, who did not want to be thought completely infallible? Did they not suspend the course of justice? Were they not threatened with exile? Were they not several times banished? Were they not in the end destroyed? So it is not true that such precautions are enough to make the constitution of a state solid and unshakeable. When it is a matter of giving form to a government, it is much more important to do all that can possibly be done when you have full authority; the longer vices last, the harder it is to remedy them.

On all sides, among all nations, I see monuments which bear witness to the authority of the sovereign. I see none which bear witness to the liberty of the nation. If there is some drawback to fear, however, it is not that the monarch will forget his prerogative, but that the subjects will forget their rights.

It used to be (and still is) said in France, 'We are destroying our Parlement and the Empress of Russia means to establish one in her country.' But did not the destruction of this Parlement signify to her that she had something better to do? The Empress has felt the need for a trustee of the fundamental laws of the state. She has seen the violation and destruction of the trustee of our fundamental laws. Therefore, she should have concluded, 'If the fundamental laws of Russia do not have a better trustee than that, I have done nothing for

their survival.' So she should have asked herself, 'If I do not want the trustee of my laws violated or destroyed, what form should it take?'

It is true that the Empress said to me, in person, that the moment this violation and destruction occurred she saw the French people in the most contemptible and abject light. I suppose that France might have had more energy and that this crime might only have taken place after a long effusion of blood. I do not doubt that the Empress would have applauded us. But what would that amount of blood have taught her? That the constitution of her empire should be such that none of her successors could be tempted to violate and destroy the trustee of her laws, since among a brave people such violation does not occur without assassinations and murders. I confess it would give me great pleasure to read some pages of commentary by that remarkable woman on these articles of her Instruction.

In nature, the destruction of one creature is always the generation of another; but the latter is always less perfect. I very much wish that there might be an exception to this order of things, and that from the destruction of our Parlement and the corruption of the English Parliament, there would arise in St Petersburg something better than either. If Catherine concerns herself with that, there will be.

XVI

*A trustee of the laws is necessary; certainly, this trustee cannot be in the body politic, etc. That is indeed the question. It is a matter of knowing how to prevent the trustee from being violated. Violated by both the sovereign and the magistrate. It is a matter of knowing what the *corps dépositaire* should do when its function has been violated by the sovereign.*

XVII

*Who is the trustee of the laws? An institution which examines, authorises, publishes and carries out the will of the sovereign. But what guarantees the strength and survival of this institution? In France the *corps dépositaire* was the Parlement, but the Parlement no longer exists. In Russia it is the senate, but the senate is nothing: a voice crying out in the desert. One day Herod had that head which cried out in the desert cut off, and it was presented on a plate to Herodias.*

XVIII

This institution prevents the people from treating the sovereign's order with contempt and impunity. Yes, with impunity, that is true.

This institution checks the whims and greed of the sovereign. Where? That does not even happen in London. The rich man buys the votes of his constituents to win the honour of representing them; the court buys the votes of the representatives to govern more despotically. Would a wise nation not work to prevent both kinds of corruption? Is it not astonishing that this was not done the day one representative had the impudence to keep his constituents waiting in his ante-chamber and eventually said to them, 'I do not know what you want, but I shall only do what I have in mind myself. You cost me a lot of money to buy, and I am determined to sell you for as much as I can get.' Or on the day that the minister [Walpole] boasted of having in his wallet the price of every person of integrity in England?

If the right to represent others is bought, the richest will always be the representative. If it is not bought, the representative will cost less. I am sometimes tempted to think that in England there is a corruption of representatives, as in France there is a corruption of government officers: two necessary evils.

XIX

[Diderot attacks the physiocratic insistence that laws should be based on a natural order.]

That may be, but when will such an order be discovered? Who will introduce it? How many interests will be opposed to its establishment?

In France, it would be necessary to commit an incredible number of injustices in abolishing privileges, rights, distinctions, etc., of which some were granted as rewards for services and other acquired by money. It would be necessary for the monarch to trample underfoot the oath he took at his consecration. He would have to flout every order in the state. In Russia, or in Constantinople, that would be to put his crown and his head at risk.

But, it will be said, this is a reform to be introduced gradually. That means that you rely on two or three just, good, enlightened and, above all, resolute sovereigns. And that, unfortunately, is what puts Le

Mercier de la Rivière's book,⁴ for the most part, in the category of utopias. There is a great deal of difference between a civilised people and a people to be civilised; the condition of the former seems to me worse than that of the latter. One is healthy and the other is attacked by an old, and almost incurable, evil. And then, what should be thought of a system in which no account has been taken of madness, the passions, self-interest, prejudices, etc.? I regard all modern works on politics as being like a watch made by a geometrician, which would take no account of friction, shock or gravity. Some have clearly seen the evil and not indicated the remedy, others have supposed the machine to be healthy and quite new; or, if they have been aware of the fault, they have not had enough sense of the difficulty of correcting it. On one side, no remedy, on the other, no means of applying it.

XX

The equality of citizens consists in their all being submitted to the same laws. The word equally should be added.

This paragraph involves the abolition of all the privileges attached to the nobility, Church and magistracy. But I ask what precautions will be taken so that citizens who are unequal in power, strength and every kind of means, should all be equal before the law. That ought to be the case and it has always been assumed as such; but it never has been so, and perhaps never can be. It is certainly a subject worth considering.

There are some fortunate accidents which destroy the inequality between two individuals who are naturally equal. There is a natural inequality between two individuals; there are conventional inequalities, which depend on the position each person occupies in society. If merit has decided this position then the inequality enters into the category of natural differences. I respect all such inequalities; they are a share of property. But I cannot allow artificial rights or privileges which are attached to particular occupations. They result in the burden of society being unequally shared and the authority of the laws being different. Look for some other way to distinguish men. Give

⁴ *L'Ordre naturel et essentiel des sociétés politiques* (1767), which suggested that physiocratic ideas should be implemented by 'legal despotism'.

money or medals, erect statues, etc. This point still needs much discussion.

There can be excellent notions, the advantages of which may not soon be evident; and that should be no surprise. Things are sometimes so complex that only experience or genius can overcome them. Experience proceeds slowly and demands time; and for a genius, who, like the messengers of gods, crosses an immense space in a single bound, we may have to wait centuries. Has he appeared? He is rejected or persecuted. If he speaks, no one listens. If by chance he is heard, jealousy portrays his projects as magnificent fantasies and so discredits them.

The general interest of the multitude would perhaps supplement the insight of the genius, if it were allowed to act freely. But it is continually contradicted by the authority of men who hear nothing and set out to order everything. Who is the person they honour with their confidence and intimacy? The brazen flatterer who, not believing a word he says, continually tells them that they are marvellous. The evil produced by their stupidity is perpetuated by a false shame which prevents them from retracing their steps. They exhaust themselves in wrong solutions before they come to the right ones, or before they can decide to approve them after having rejected them. So, through the childhood of sovereigns, the incapacity or pride of ministers, and the patience of the victims, disorder reigns. We would be consoled for past and present evils, if the future should change this destiny. But that is a hope which is impossible to nurse. And if the *philosophe* were asked what use is the advice which he stubbornly gives to nations and those governing them, and he replied sincerely, he would say that he was satisfying an unconquerable urge to speak the truth, on the off-chance of arousing indignation and even of drinking from the cup of Socrates.

XXI

[*Political liberty does not consist in doing everything one wants.*] This maxim should apply equally to sovereignty. Sovereignty and liberty do not consist in doing everything one wants; sovereignty and liberty are each limited by the same constraint: respect for property, on the part of the sovereign, and its use, on the part of the subject.

XXII

It is necessary to develop a clear and distinct idea of liberty. Certainly. If a citizen can do what the laws forbid there would be no more liberty. Certainly. But if it was not a citizen who had this power, but the sovereign, would there be liberty? There would undoubtedly be the liberty of a single individual, and the servitude of all. From which I think it follows that the servitude of one person is the essential preliminary for the liberty of all the others.

An Indian chief from Spanish America made a journey to France. The first question he was asked at court was whether he had any slaves. 'Slaves?', he replied. 'I am only aware of one slave among my subjects, and that is me.' This sublime and beautiful reply should have made him seem contemptible in the palace of a king who said of a sultan who had had chopped off a dozen of the leading heads of the Divan, 'That is what is called reigning.' A courtier had the courage to answer him, 'Yes, Sire. But while I was ambassador at the Porte I saw six sovereigns, who knew how to reign like that, strangled.' And was this truthful courtier disgraced? I do not know. All I know is that his master pretended not to hear him and turned his back on him. The despot says that the person who is afraid of saying a difficult and useful truth to his master is a coward, and he is right. But he does not say that the despot who disgraces the courageous man (who dared to speak a difficult and useful truth) is sowing seeds of cowardice around him.

XXIII

[For a citizen political liberty is that tranquillity of mind which comes from the general opinion that everyone is secure; to achieve this liberty, the government must be such that one citizen is not afraid of another, but that all together fear the laws.] This definition is incomplete. It is not enough for political liberty that one citizen should be sheltered from injury by another. The subject must be protected from injury by the sovereign, and society should have nothing to fear from the latter. That cannot occur unless the sovereign abdicates part of his power. This will only be temporary unless he takes every imaginable precaution to ensure that the power he has abdicated is not taken back by some stupid and tyrannical successor.

But which part of his authority should he abdicate? Of what does it consist? To whom should it be entrusted? A body representing the nation should be its trustee. What should be the prerogative of this body? To revise, approve or disapprove the wishes of the sovereign, and to convey them to the people. Who should make up this body? Owners of large property. How should this body be given some strength? That is a matter of time, of public consideration, of its own constitution, of its rules and the sanction given to these rules, of the oath taken by the members of this body, of the permanence of those members, of the privilege of naming them and how far that is reserved exclusively for the sovereign, etc.

If the sovereign sincerely wishes to bind himself and his successor, he will surely find the means to do so.

XXIV

[It is virtually only savages who are dominated by nature and climate.]

I find it very difficult to believe that climate does not have a great influence on national character; that the American overcome by heat can have the same character as the inhabitant of the North hardened by cold; that a people who live in the midst of frozen wastes can enjoy the same cheerfulness as a people who can stroll in a garden almost the whole year round. Do you think that the peasants of a country which has eight months of winter can be like the peasants of a country which hardly has two or three such months, and even those very mild? This permanent cause will produce its effect on everything, not excluding the productions of the arts, laws, food, taste, amusements, etc.

XXV

*[The acknowledged untrustworthiness of the Chinese has kept them from commerce with Japan.]*⁵ Instead of *acknowledged untrustworthiness* I think it should be called *this activity*.

⁵ In his *Esprit des lois* (Bk. XIX, ch. 10), Montesquieu had contrasted Spanish honesty and lack of commercial expertise with Chinese untrustworthiness and success in commerce.

XXVI

Legislation should follow the spirit of the nation. I do not think so. Legislation should make the spirit of the nation. I am well aware that Solon followed the spirit of his nation; but he was not a despot, nor did he have to deal with an enslaved and barbarous people. When you have the power to do everything and there is nothing yet done, you should not stick to the best laws that a people can accept. You must give them the best laws possible.

XXVII

The laws are the individual and precise institutions of the legislator. Nature made all the good laws; it is the legislator who makes them public. I would gladly say to sovereigns, 'If you want your laws to be observed, ensure that they never conflict with nature.' I would say to the priest 'Do not let your morality oppose innocent pleasures.' Thunder and threaten us as much as you like, show us the dungeons and infernos beneath our feet. You will not stifle in me the wish to be happy. My wish to be happy is the first article of a Code which precedes all legislation, and of every religious system.

XXVIII

The more communication there is between peoples, the more their customs change. And that is the reason why the Chinese do not leave their own country, nor allow entry. Do they achieve good? Do they cause harm? Certainly those Russians who have been abroad have brought back to their country the follies of the nations they visited, and none of the wisdom, all their vices and none of their virtues. And I think that travel, as undertaken nowadays by young lords, leads to more corruption than instruction.

XXIX

[*It is a very bad policy to want to change by laws what should be changed by customs.*] This article seems to make *mœurs* independent of laws.

I think that *mœurs* derive from laws. A savage people has *mœurs* when you see among them natural laws, humanity, gentleness, chari-

table acts, loyalty, good faith, etc. A civilised people has *mœurs* when you generally see among them natural and civil laws.

Mœurs are good when the laws which are observed are good, and bad when the laws which are observed are bad. There are no *mœurs* when good or bad laws are not observed.

If you look at the matter closely, you will see that the difference in the *mœurs* of the nobility and those of ordinary people derive from the same source. The *mœurs* of the people, when they are good, are those of a savage when he is good. The *mœurs* of the nobility are the *mœurs* of a civilised people when it is wicked. The other differences relate to coarseness and politeness.

XXX

The public prosecutor says: *This observation refers to the civil, political and criminal laws, and not to the natural laws.* So the first are not the essential consequences of the latter; so they are variable.

XXXI

There are ways of preventing crimes. No doubt:

1. By not creating imaginary crimes;
2. By making men happy;
3. By enlightening them about their interests;
4. By preventing idleness;
5. By moderating the criminal laws;
6. By requiring the criminal to repair the wrong which his crime has done to society. The true punishment for an assassin is to be made a yardstick.

XXXII

Resentment is the only law of nature. The social law has taken its place. Resentment used to vary according to the character of the offence and the offended person. Civil law forgets resentment and only weighs up the nature of the offence. In becoming subject to the law, the indulgent person has become vindictive, and the vindictive person indulgent.

XXXIII

It is customary to punish impiety by civil punishments. It seems that the Empress is inclined to limit the punishment to excommunication, and she is right.

XXXIV

Actions which offend decency and good *mœurs* should be avoided, but not punished. In particular, the penalty of infamy^a would be a senseless atrocity. The law against adultery, everywhere proclaimed, has everywhere fallen into disuse. The best precaution is to decrease the number of bachelors; and the number of bachelors is decreased by general affluence.

XXXV

I have the impression that men generally risk their honour sooner than their lives, and their lives sooner than their fortune. Honour is a motive for only a very small number of men, and life means little if it is not happy. As a result, of all tangible punishments, fines should be the most frequent. Punishment by infamy should be rare; the disgraced person is condemned to wickedness. There should be few capital punishments; because one man has been killed, it is not necessary to kill a second. The assassin who is put to death is no longer good for anything, and there are so many public works to which he could be condemned! Lots of fines, part of which should go to the offended party.

Banishment seems to me an assault on international rights. To send a malefactor to do wrong not at home but somewhere else is to introduce him into the house of your neighbour.

It seems to me that a time should be fixed, beyond which if not all, at least certain, crimes (like theft), which are being investigated for the reparation of the wrong done, should not be punished. Here is an example. A man aged between nineteen and twenty is an accomplice to a crime. He marries, has children, conducts a trade or goes into business. He is honest in his business, a good father, husband, neigh-

^a Under Roman law, the penalty of infamy was a punishment for a civil offence which entailed the loss of certain civil rights, like that of holding public office.

bour, citizen. His good behaviour is notorious. After eighteen or nineteen years his former companions in crime are arrested and denounce him. Will justice proceed to seize this man in his home? Tear him away from his position, his wife and children, drag him into a dungeon, and from the dungeon to torture? Will he be judged on the basis of one unfortunate moment in his life? Is there no citizen who might not be allowed to pay for his offence in instalments, if it were certain that the arrangement would be faithfully observed? In this case, which is not rare (for I have seen it happen twice), I ask if the law, having made close acquaintance with the life and behaviour of the accused from the time he committed the crime, should not leave the citizen undisturbed in his home, and should not only remit the punishment but cherish his reputation.

This brings me to another question, which is to know whether the civil law should not have some secret articles, moderating its severity and restraining it, while leaving it all its fearsomeness. I would rather the law be secretly inadvertent than that it should publicly proclaim mercy. The public declaration of mercy is a formal denial of the aim of punishment. Mercy always shows someone being above the law, and law should be above everyone, without exception. That there is no question of mercy in the Instruction is a first secret article.

The law which removes from society a wrongdoer who has cured himself, would be like a surgeon who cut off a limb from a sick person because that limb was previously unhealthy. I follow the comparison of the Instruction which states that the death penalty is like the cure of a sick society.

The confiscation of goods, for any crime whatever, seems to me an injustice (except in the case of a citizen so isolated that there is no one with a right to his inheritance). It is taking the goods of another, punishing the child for the crime of the father, ruining an innocent family. Why condemn to poverty those who have not gone astray?

I do not recall having read in the Instruction a single article which dealt with the oath. To demand that a guilty person make an oath to speak the truth is a sure way of adding perjury to the committed crime. If it is unnecessary to demand this of the accused, it is perhaps different with the accusers. The oath which the English have is beautiful: *Swear to speak the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth.*

XXXVI

[Love of country, shame and fear of rebuke are good reasons for restraint and can stop many crimes.]

Love of country is a fleeting motive which scarcely lasts longer than the danger to the society.

Shame and fear of rebuke, which restrain a small number of upright souls, will never form the spirit and *mœurs* of a great nation. These means should be replaced by liberty, and the security of persons and property – by happiness. The penalty for a bad action should not consist in being convicted for it. A bad action rarely goes unpunished. That is to say, it is punished by itself, which will always be the case if the good and bad of the society are indivisibly linked with the good and bad of those who compose it.

There are no general and constant *mœurs* except those which are based on legislation.

It is the criminal part of the Code above all which, without ceasing to be a consequence of the natural law, is (and should be) liable to frequent correction.

Circumstances should often cause the relation between crime and punishment to alter, because they cause the nature of the crimes to alter.

There are epidemic crimes. A great legislator will find their cause and cure, as a great doctor will find the cause of, and cure for, illnesses of the same kind.

XXXVII

It is impossible to love a country which does not love you. It is impossible that a patriotism founded on true happiness should be extinguished.

XXXVIII

I hate penalties of infamy. In dishonouring the man they condemn him, and turn him to crime. Infamy should either be driven out of the state or prevented from spreading freely, by being restricted to sentences involving public service.

XXXIX

[*The power of the judge should be limited solely to the execution of the laws.*] But if the legislative and executive power cannot be separated, without causing confusion, two things follow: either that we should submit to despotism, or that the only good government is democratic.

I think that these two powers should be separated from the magistracy, because experience has shown two things: that when the magistrate concerns himself with matters of administration he neglects individuals, and that when the legislator does not proceed according to the liking of the magistrate, the latter takes his revenge by ceasing to function as a magistrate.

XL

The decisions of courts should never be printed. In time they form a counter-authority to the law. The commentators on the holy books have made a thousand heresies. The commentators on laws have stifled them. There should be no other authority or means of defence before the courts except the law and reason or eternal justice. Once the sentence has been passed or executed, the decision of the court reverts to nothing; it should be forbidden to cite it. If the court has been deceived, to cite the sentence is to invite it to commit the same injustice once again. Forbid all citation of decrees.

XLI

It seems to me that there are two kinds of honour which are too often confused. A soldier can have his honour without being an honourable person. There is the honour of the man and the honour of the profession. Everyone is eager for the latter.

XLII

In a monarchical government the Code will be greatly simplified if all privileges attached to differences of condition are abolished. These privileges are harmful both to the equal submission of everyone to the law, and to the just distribution of taxes.

If the maxim *Divide and rule* is true, the privileges granted to certain

categories have two drawbacks; one in relation to exclusive titles, the other because of the support they give to that despotism which grants and withdraws them.

The democratic state can be depicted by a huge number of bowls placed more or less equally on the same level, with one pressing against another. Their level is equal but the pressure varies according to the volume of the bowls. In the monarchical state the bowls are in a pyramid. The bowl on top presses on the three or four which form the level below it; this level presses on another, under which is a third, and so on down to the base, the last level, which touches the ground and which is crushed by the weight of all the others.

In revolutions, if the state is democratic, the bowls move apart; while if the state is monarchical, the pyramid is turned upside down with a terrifying uproar. In the former, each tends to remain firmly on its level, and the principal bowl remains quietly in its place.

When the bowls are horizontal, impact occurs laterally. When they are in a pyramid, the impact proceeds from below. In the first, everyone wants to have elbow-room. In the second, everyone wants to get to the level above. In the first, the competition is to occupy a space, in the second, the ambition is to go up. The first has a centre, the second a top.

XLIII

This distinction of conditions and possessions, a relic of earlier bad government among certain people, is an eternal obstacle to good legislation. When you have sovereign authority and have to build anew, you must cleanse the air of all such rubbish.

XLIV

It is clear that the more the concerns of government are multiplied, the more courts there will be. But if it happens that the jurisprudence of one court should be in contradiction with that of another, that is a result of the courts having been instituted without any fixed rule to define them. If in creating these courts a man always aimed at liberty and property, then the laws, all converging on the same point, would not be opposed. They would be so many different roads leading to a common centre.

The secret cause of all disorder is undoubtedly the selfish sovereign, always separating himself from his nation. He thinks he is at war with it. It will be a glorious moment when sovereigns feel that the happiness of their subjects and their own safety are one and the same. When they are no longer afraid of our strength, they will no longer keep us weak. Only the unhappy or oppressed ever revolt.

The limit of unhappiness or oppression is fixed by nature. It is engraved in the furrow of the labourer. The earth demands one share; the man who cultivates it should reserve a second portion for himself; the third belongs to the owner. I defy the most terrible despot to infringe this distribution without condemning part of his people to die of hunger. That is the moment of revolt. I have taken agriculture as an example, because in the last resort all oppression comes down to the land.

XLV

There is a great drawback in having many courts: conflicts of jurisdiction, trials lengthened by the deliberations of the judges settling them, uncertainty and contradictions as a result of delay in the administration of justice. Nothing is so common as hearing people say: If you appear before this court you will win; if you appear before another you lose. This does not take account of the fact that procedure gradually alters.

XLVI

[On the importance of formalities in law.]

All these articles seem to me extremely wise. The more you think about this axiom – *Form is the queen of the world* – the more true you find it. The simpler the form, the better it certainly is, if that is in keeping with the rights of liberty and property. It is no less true that this conformity ought to be a complication. Our Code of procedure is taken to be a masterpiece, and the reason for this perfection is that no act can be suppressed without disadvantage. It remains to be discovered if the length of trials is not the greatest disadvantage of all.

You allow lengthy procedure in criminal trials. But is it not very cruel to keep an innocent man in prison for years? Have you not

thought that this long detention often ruins him completely? The law which punishes the guilty grants no compensation to the innocent.

There are two kinds of lawsuit: trials of audience and trials of report. Trials of audience are summary affairs, in which the decision is prompt. In trials of report the decision will be equally prompt when the *rapporteur* has done his duty.

Whether it is a matter of audience or report, judgement is given at the supreme court or a lower provincial court. In the latter case it may be a matter of appeal. All cases of appeal should be a matter of report, with defence of the parties concerned. In the former case the judge confirms or annuls in court the sentence of the lower judge and the matter is closed.

The sovereign should forbid all recall. Recall is always an insult to the magistrate. Everything which relates to the exercise of justice comes down to finding enlightened and honest magistrates.

Should justice be free, or not? That is almost a question of words. It comes down to this: should the salary of the judge go from the pocket of the plaintiff into the hand of the sovereign, and from his hand into that of the judge; or from the hand of the plaintiff immediately into the hand of the judge?

The bad faith of the plaintiff is one of the principal reasons for the length of trials. It is as great as that of the lawyer, and greater than his greed. The other causes of the length of trials are the observance of procedure (which cannot be remedied, since there must be some form of due process); the self-interest of the prosecutor, lawyer and usher; the bad faith of the plaintiff; and the idleness or iniquity of the judge.

I do not know if the procedure of the Romans is compatible with our modern legislation. This matter is much more complicated than it seems. So far as I can tell it is always those in the wrong who obstruct everything.

What is procedure? It is a sequence of acts prescribed by law to reach a definitive verdict on a case. Why has the legislator prescribed this sequence? For the freedom and safety of the citizen. Why could not one of these acts be suppressed? Because there would be as many different procedures as trials, if provision had not been taken to subject them all to the same general form.

XLVII

[*Formalities increase by virtue of the fact that the honour, life and liberty of the citizens are respected.*] This article only speaks of one sort of formality, but there are two.

The first, which is discussed here, concerns the procedure as it relates to the institution of the laws. The second, which is not mentioned, consists of the procedure relating to their execution. About the latter it is often said that *the form takes away the content*, which never ought to be the case.

This second formality is no less worthy of respect than the first. It therefore seems to me that the severest measure which could be taken would be to disturb the procedure and order a retrial at the expense of those who have infringed the formality. In such an instance it should have been violated on a very important point.

In our courts formality is strictly observed. This sometimes causes the repeat of a trial which has lasted many years, and the ruin of the plaintiff who is in the right. The person who invokes strict formalities is almost always in the wrong.

XLVIII

The defence of an accused should not be left to youth and inexperience. This is undoubtedly a way to develop lawyers, but at the expense of citizens. Young people should listen a long time before speaking. That is even more important when on their decision hangs the life, honour, fortune and liberty of a citizen.

XLIX

It is very difficult to fix the number of witnesses. There may be one man whose testimony I would value more than that of a whole nation. I think it is necessary to assess the nature of the deed, the character of the accused, and that of the accusers.

Those savages on the island of Madagascar are not so savage in their criminal proceedings. They sit down in a circle, with a bundle of sticks in front of each person. This is how they use them.

The accuser is introduced, and sticks are set out for him or against him. The same happens with the accused. Both men appear before

the court. The accuser puts forward a way of bringing justice. Sticks are set out either for or against this suggestion. The accused replies, and sticks are set out for or against his reply. The accusation and defence continue until the end. Then the oldest of the judges gets up and leaves; and his opinion (which, whatever it may be, is unknown) is assessed by the sticks; and this continues through to the youngest. The same ceremony begins again, proceeding from the youngest to the oldest. That done, the sticks for and against are counted and the accuser is acquitted or condemned. I have this fact from a blind, truthful, wise and enlightened witness, who did not suggest that this practice was common throughout the island.

L

To appoint a magistrate to prosecute cases without litigants, unless the case was a criminal or capital matter, seems to me very dangerous. This magistrate can become the tyrant and scourge of his fellow-citizens. The threat of a trial is very frightening.

LI

The legislator as representing in his person the whole society, and uniting in his hands all power.

In her Instruction Catherine II has still not sufficiently forgotten that she is sovereign. You come across lines in which, without her being aware of the fact, she takes up again the sceptre she had put down at the beginning.

In no place has she given a ruling to the nation on the succession to the throne of the empire, in the event of her son dying without children. In ruling on this important point she could have effectively decided another: the legal and legitimate succession of her son, his descendants and their descendants. She foresaw a moment when half the nation could have been massacred by the other. She sent the sceptre back to the nation and laid down the manner in which the election of a new king should proceed, under pain of illegitimate election.

She has said nothing about taxation.

She has said nothing about war and the support of the armies. Every people which makes war has an aim. If there are too many

people and not enough space, that aim is to gain more space. If there is too much space and not enough people, it is to obtain people.

In the war between Russia and Prussia,⁷ if the Russians had done the right thing when they were in Berlin, they would have taken away the whole capital – men, women and children, workers, manufactures, furniture – and left behind only the walls. What I say of the Prussians, I say too of the Cossacks. If this transfer of population had been proposed to me, I would have taken care that it should occur in the most orderly way possible, and I would have spread all the new wealth through my empire. That would have been more advantageous to Russia and more harmful to Prussia than ten victories.

But, it will be said, that is making war like barbarians. The feeling of humanity is extinguished the moment war flares up. What! Is it an act of barbarism to pick up men and transplant them from one country to another, and not an act of barbarism to massacre them on a battlefield? Is it an act of barbarism to grow rich, and not one to ruin your enemy completely and half ruin yourself?

I would not have made slaves; on the contrary, I needed a third estate, and it would have been brought into being. I needed workers of every kind and I would have provided myself with them. I needed free men who would have taught my subjects the value of liberty, and they would have known it.

But, someone may add, many of these captives would have died on the way. I do not think so. If this expedition had been proposed, it would only have been a question of providing the necessary food and tents.

But these men would have been recalled in times of peace; when you set out on a campaign you do not intend to make a shameful peace.

The Empress has said nothing about the emancipation of the serfs. But that is a very important point. Does she want the nation to carry on in slavery? Does she not know that there can be no true civilisation, laws, population, agriculture, trade, wealth, science, taste or art, where liberty does not exist?

She has said nothing about the education of a successor to the empire. Why has there been no ruling on this matter? Has she not been aware that all the good she can do depends on it? The sovereign

⁷ In 1760, when Russia had been allied with Austria and joined in the Austrian attempt to reduce Frederick's growing power in Prussia, Russian troops had occupied Berlin.

who has his successor brought up through the nation ensures the crown for his family and a good king for the people.

She has said nothing about her educational establishments – schools, girls' schools, schools for cadets, orphans and apprentices. She has said nothing about village schools for the people, where I would like the children to find food and instruction. She has said nothing about public colleges. She has said nothing about the rights of sovereignty. In a true Instruction this would be the list of subjects: the choice of government; the sovereign; the succession; the successor to the empire and his education; the emancipation of serfs; civil and criminal laws; the nobility; war; the navy; finance; the judiciary; the priesthood; trade and agriculture; population; public education, small schools and colleges, institutions already made and to be made in the future. And the Instruction, instead of being an extract, would have become a work of originality, a set of principles made in good faith. To achieve such an original work you would need the aid of ten men of outstanding ability.

LII

Nothing is more dangerous than the common saying: You should take the spirit of the law and not stick to the letter. The letter kills, the spirit brings life. In other words, nothing is more difficult than to have good magistrates. I agree. But that is something for which you have to work, and go on working, until this common saying is no longer dangerous.

LIII

[On the problem of differing judgements.] This paragraph gives rise to a question which is well worth solving.

There is no law which can cover all possible cases; none which, without the most glaring injustice, can apply equally to all guilty men.

There are circumstances which the law has not foreseen, and in the cases which it has foreseen there are circumstances which lessen the crime or make it worse.

Either you oblige the magistrate to stick rigorously to the law, or he is allowed to alter and moderate it. In the first instance you make him a savage beast; in the second you leave the laws open to chance. When

the circumstance has not been foreseen by the legislator, the guilty person escapes, and the legislator is continually busy reforming his code.

Here is an example: a highwayman comes up to a passer-by and, pointing the barrel of his gun at his throat, says to him, 'Here is an excellent weapon which you will do me the pleasure of purchasing.' 'How much?' 'Twenty guineas. Here is my gun.' 'Here are the twenty guineas.' The buyer cocks the gun and prepares to shoot the head off the seller, who says, 'Sir, what you are doing is useless. There is nothing in my gun.'

If this thief is caught, is it necessary to send him down and make a new law forbidding the sale of weapons on the highway? I am not deciding anything; I am asking.

The one thing I see is that it is much more important to have good judges than good laws. *Quid proficiunt leges, sine moribus.*⁸ The best laws are useless if the judge is bad, and the worst laws can be put right by good judges. So the first concern of the legislator is to make people honest; and to make people honest you must begin at the beginning, by educating the young. This is the only way to give *mœurs*, or to restore them.

LIV

[On commentaries on the law.]

What is a commentator on sacred writings? An interpreter of the divine law. What is a commentator on the Code? An interpreter of the civil law. I would have none of these interpreters. Among civilised nations all works of this kind should be burnt; and among nations still to be civilised they should be prevented from appearing. The priests have been much more cunning than sovereigns; they made us drink in the dogmas of religion with our mother's milk.

If I were sovereign, I would have arranged the catechism in such a way that the children would have learnt their moral and civil duties at the same time as their religious duties. Alongside the law of God, they would have the law of Man, the Citizen and the State.

⁸ 'What can laws achieve, if there are no *mœurs*?' Horace, *Odes*, III, 24, 35.

LV

Therefore it is necessary to prescribe that in all schools the catechism and the Code are read to the children in equal measure.

It would be better if it were one and the same book. The divine laws consecrate the civil laws, or the latter civilise the sacred laws. Both are equally agreeable to me. In this way what would happen would be that this work would contain only those religious principles which did not clash with the principles of society, except under pain of contradiction. There would only be one code left, that of nature, on which the two others would be modelled. Man would no longer be in the position of alternately trampling one or the other underfoot. It is impossible to satisfy both at the same time, as we try to do – a mistake which has eventually left us with neither men, nor citizens, nor believers. There would no longer be the drawback of a child taking the law of society for the law of God, or vice versa. It is certain that these ideas would be so closely associated in his mind that he would be as apprehensive of sinning against one as against the other.

When you establish laws, you should not put them under the sanction of religion. When they have been established it is another matter, and a further matter again when instructing citizens. The priest seems to me quite suited to this role, provided he is not allowed any commentary. It is good that in churches submission to God and to society are preached in equal measure; and that each lesson has the same solemnity.

I have read that in the island of Ternate⁹ all worship consisted of the following: there was a temple, in the middle of which stood a pyramid. On certain days the temple was open, and the people would run in and bow down in front of the pyramid. On it was written 'Adore God, love your neighbour, and obey the law.' In silence the priest would point with a stick to the words on the pyramid. That done, the people would get up and leave, the doors of the temple were shut, and the whole divine office was over. If you cannot establish the simple religion of the island of Ternate, have its priest, and cut out his tongue.

I regard *philosophes* in a society, when they fulfil their duties, as the best defenders of the sovereign, if he is good. Sitting in their studies,

⁹ One of the Moluccan islands, first colonised by the Portuguese, then occupied by the Dutch, and now administered by Indonesia.

they are like those buckets of water hanging up in the corridors of our police commissioners, ready to be thrown over the flames of fanaticism.

LVI

[To allow the magistrate, who executes the laws and sends a citizen to prison, to take away one man's freedom on the frivolous pretext of leaving another free, is to sin against personal security.]

Suitable precautions are here taken against the despotism of the magistrate, but none against the despotism of the sovereign.

LVII

There is no doubt a difference between detention and imprisonment. But both detention and imprisonment, in taking a citizen away from his business, are equally harmful to him. Society owes an indemnity to an innocent man detained, a greater indemnity to one imprisoned, and in both cases public reparation. It is a kind of calumny which leaves a scar if the law does not remove it.

Public prejudice favours the law and authority against a detained or imprisoned man. It is both vital and just that that prejudice should be destroyed.

Certainly, if we look at the matter only from the perspective of society's interest, there is generally more to fear from a bad man than to expect from a good one. But for humanity's sake we should rather risk an unpunished crime than an unjust punishment.

A man who has been detained and then acquitted should not be branded with any infamy. That is not enough, if his detention has adversely affected his wealth. He should be compensated; that is society's debt. Public society having demanded his detention, it is for public justice to put right the wrong done to him.

The confiscation of goods of a guilty person is announced [in the Instruction]; no indemnity for the innocent is mentioned. What more reasonable use of confiscated goods could there be than that some are distributed to the victims of miscarriages of justice?

The recognition of innocence does not prevent promotion to high office. We are more severe, and this severity does not seem to me misplaced. We do not only want the integrity of our magistrates to have been beyond suspicion; among us, just being in prison disquali-

fies someone from several public positions. The sovereign can get his minister from the galleys; but the person who has passed under the grill of the little Châtelet¹⁰ cannot hold office in consular or county law. The personal sentence of the police has the same effect.

LVIII

[On imperfections in legal proof.]

Is that not one of those circumstances in which the law is necessarily left to the discretion of the judge? A Code excludes an immense number of details which would fix the degrees of probability.

LXIX

Our criminal procedure is a kind of inquisition. It seems that the judge tries to find a guilty party. A prisoner is not told the reason for his detention. Proceedings begin with several specious questions being put to him. The charges and any information are scrupulously hidden from him. He is confronted by the witnesses only at the last moment. I would readily call that the art of making men guilty, not that of establishing guilt.

LX

Why mention imaginary crimes, about magic and witchcraft? That is the way to persuade people of the existence of magicians, who are in fact only troublemakers. God can be the subject of an article of legislation, but not the devil.

Here is an example of something which recently happened in Holland, where one bad law has brought in another even worse. The prisoner is put to torture, because it is decreed that a criminal must not be executed without confessing his crime. An unfortunate man said to his judges: 'I would never be able to confess the wrong of which I am accused. But when I look at the proofs which you set against me, I find them so strong and conclusive that they persuade me of my guilt . . . Your honours, it is certain, it is absolutely necessary, that I must have committed the crime of which I am

¹⁰ One of the Parisian prisons.

accused.' And this speech was spoken with the calm voice and demeanour of a man making an impartial judgement with respect to someone else. He escaped torture. This confession does not seem positive enough.

Whatever may be the multiplicity of laws, regulations and decrees, it is impossible that they should be contradictory if they all relate to one fixed point; and that fixed point is given, it is liberty and property.

LXI

How should punishments be related to crimes? There are crimes which attack society, others which attack individuals. Among the former are those which undermine society's peace, security, honour and interest. The same applies to crimes against individuals. In both cases there are issues of life, honour, freedom and fortune, of circumstance and motive, and of the character of the person.

There is an initial punishment which is arbitrary. Once this is fixed, it determines all the others. Then, when a crime has been committed and punishment given, if the criminal code has been well made, you can declare if the code is lenient or harsh. There are cases in which circumstances aggravate the matter: deserting in peace or war, or on guard-duty, or leaving the tent, in cold blood or after a punishment, regardless of whether that punishment is just or unjust, heavy or light.

LXII

The same crime calls for different punishments according to time, place, circumstance, *mœurs*, governments. It would be absurd to establish the same penalty for secret assemblies in a republican state as in a despotic state. Twenty years of secret meetings in London could not get rid of Prime Minister Walpole. An assembly of twenty janissaries in Constantinople would be enough to assassinate the sultan and vizier, and bloody the flagstones of the Divan.¹¹

I do not intend to take away from [Beccaria's] *Dei delitti e delle pene* the humane character which has brought it so great a success. I am as much concerned as anyone else about the life of the innocent, and my

¹¹ The Divan was the general council of the Ottoman Empire, presided over by the grand vizier when the sultan was absent.

personal opinion can only inspire me with the greatest pity for the guilty. Nevertheless, I cannot resist making some calculations.

In our capital fewer than 150 men are put to death each year. In all the courts of France scarcely that number are tortured. That is, 300 men in 25 million, or one man in 83,000. Is not more damage done by vice, exhaustion, a ball, parties, danger, a ruined courtesan, a carriage, mischance, cold, or a bad doctor? To save the life of a man is always an excellent deed, even though there may be a presumption against this man which does not apply to the victim of a bad doctor. From this I only draw the conclusion that there are many disadvantages [to Beccaria's ideas] which are in different ways serious and which have not received any attention.

LXIII

The apparatus of torture cannot be too frightening. A corpse torn to pieces makes a greater impression than beheading a man who is still alive.

LXIV

Infamy and ridicule should be the only penalties against fanatics.

No infamy. Disgraced people are condemned as wrongdoers by the law itself. Penalties of infamy should be very rare. When a man is despicable he should be driven out of society. Ridicule alone is enough against fanatics: look at Harlequin and Pulcinella.

LXV

The promptness of the punishment increases the idea of its certainty. In this way their necessary connection is established in people's minds. The person who sees the crime and, shortly after, the torture, shudders. If the law were a sword suspended in mid-air, which struck the criminal at the moment the crime was committed, there would be no crimes except those of anger or revenge, and perhaps love and despair.

LXVI

If the rules on commerce are well formulated, or – to say the same thing more clearly – are drawn up by merchants, then, when nations stop being idiotic, there will be no smugglers.

LXVII

The relative position of the poor man who asks for help, and the rich citizen who only grants it on hard terms, is such that these terms soon become fatal to both borrower and lender. For the borrower, the amount lent cannot bring him as much as it has cost him, and the lender ends up not being paid by a debtor whom his own usury has made insolvent. It is difficult to find a remedy for this problem; for in the long run the lender must have his security, and the interest on the sum lent must at least exceed the security.

On both sides there is a fault in calculation which a little justice and charity on the part of the lender could mend. The latter should say to himself: this unfortunate man who has come to me is intelligent, hardworking, thrifty, and I would like to offer him a hand so that he can escape poverty. Let us see how much his industry can bring him, and not lend to him; or, if we do decide to lend to him, let us demand on the sum lent an interest which is less than the product of his work. If the interest and the product are equal, my debtor will always remain in poverty, and the least unexpected mishap will cause his collapse and the loss of my capital. On the other hand, if the product exceeds the interest, the wealth of my debtor increases from year to year; and with it the security of the funds I have entrusted to him.

Unfortunately, however, greed does not reason like prudence and humanity. There are almost no contracts and leases between rich and poor to which these principles may not apply. Do you want to be paid by your farmer, in good and bad years? Do not demand rigorously all that your land can bring in (excluding the fact that if your barns go up in flames that will be at your expense). If you want to be the only person to prosper, prosperity will often escape you. It is rare for your welfare to be completely separate from that of others. You will be the victim of the person who commits himself to more than he is able, if he is aware of that fact. He will be *your* victim, if he is not aware. And

the man who unites prudence with honesty wishes to be neither victim nor assailant.

Some so-called political experts have suggested that it matters little to the state whether wealth is in the hands of debtor or creditor, provided that public prosperity is increased. But can public prosperity increase when justice is trampled underfoot, when a minister encourages dishonesty by granting refuge from justice under the protection of the law? For if the law does not pursue, it protects. Can public prosperity increase when a seed of distrust is nurtured among the citizens? When that develops, it will make so many villains, all enemies of one another. Can public prosperity increase when borrowing, without any kind of guarantee, becomes ruinous or impossible; when there is no more credit, either inside or outside the state, and the whole nation is taken to be a collection of men without principles or *mœurs*?

No, general happiness can have no firm foundation without the validity of the commitments which are the source of that happiness. Even tax-gathering should be carried out according to the methods and rules of justice. Government bankruptcy is a scandal; it is more damaging to the morality of society than to the wealth of citizens. A time will come when all wrongs will be presented before the court of nations, and the power which commits them will itself be judged by its victims.

LXVII

The person who has a bankrupt man imprisoned harms society and himself. He harms society because he deprives it of a citizen. He harms himself because he reduces his debtor to being unable to acquit himself, and he increases the debt by the expenses of the detention. It remains to be seen if the law should support his views.

The debtor should keep his freedom; and the person to whom the debt is due should keep everything which the former can acquire, after his bankruptcy. If the unfaithful debtor conceals his fortune from the knowledge of his creditor, either he will commit such dishonesty alone and enjoy no benefit from it; or he will be condemned for the rest of his life to apparent poverty; or else he will have accomplices who will assist him. This kind of arranged trust can be punished harshly.

To some people honour has seemed a more effective motive than any other. Observe, they say, the disgrace of a debtor who defaults on his commitments; declare him incapable of performing any public function, and have no fear that he will make light of this judgement. The greediest men only sacrifice part of their life to painful work in the hope of enjoying their fortune. Now there is no pleasure in shame; see how promptly gambling debts are paid. It is not because of his sensitivity or love of justice that a ruined gambler goes within twenty-four hours to a not-wholly-reliable creditor. It is his sense of honour, his fear of being excluded from society.

But in what century, what period, is this sacred name of honour being invoked? Is it not for the government to set an example of the justice which it wants practised? Can public opinion stigmatise those individuals who have only been doing what the state openly allowed them to do? Do people still know how to blush when shame enters the houses of the great, among the holders of high office or high command, or in the sanctuary? Who can be afraid of dishonour, if those who are called men of honour know no more than anyone else about the need to be rich to become well-placed, or to be well-placed in order to get rich; if, to get promotion, it is necessary to crawl; if, to serve the state, it is necessary to please the nobility and influential women; and if all the talents of pleasing presuppose at the very least an indifference to all the virtues? I would thoroughly approve of honour if every citizen charged with honorific functions – at court, in the army, in the Church, in the magistracy – were suspended the moment he is justly pursued by a creditor, and if he were irrevocably stripped of these functions the moment the courts declare him bankrupt. It seems to me that people would lend with more confidence and would borrow with more caution. Another advantage of a rule like this is that soon the lower offices, imitating the practices and prejudices of those above them, would come to fear the same ignominy. Then faithfulness in commitments would become a feature of national *mœurs*.

LXIX

Do you want to prevent crimes? Spread enlightenment. That is true. Do you want to prevent crimes? Make the subjects happy; that will achieve even more.

If crimes are committed today, is it through lack of enlightenment? I would almost dare assert that more crimes are committed in Paris in one day than in all the forests of primitive people in a year. From which it would follow that a badly ordered society is worse than man's primitive condition. Why not?

The word 'society' makes one think of a state of union, peace, and the agreement of all individual wills towards a common goal, that of general happiness. In fact, it is exactly the opposite. It is a state of war: war of sovereign against his subjects, war of subjects against one another.

There is a great deal of difference between the condition of a people in barbarism and the condition of a people under tyranny. In the first, souls are fierce; in the second, they are cowardly.

The Empress of Russia said she missed the first Russians, and I think she is right.

Moderate the fierceness and you will have great, noble, strong and generous souls. How you can re-animate, enlarge or strengthen souls once they have been debased is unknown.

In morality as in physical matters, it is easier to descend than to rise. The body which descends follows its natural tendency, and it is against its nature, even through the effect of an accidental and violent shock, that it should ascend at all.

LXX

[With reference to serfdom:]

The proportion of slaves in Sparta was less great. I think so. They were killed at night, so that the number did not increase.

LXXI

[For the physiocrat, *the only true natural foundations of society are the needs and fears of individuals.*¹²]

I have another idea about the origin of society, which does not prevent my recognising the wisdom of this remark.

If the earth by itself had satisfied all the needs of man, there would have been no society. From which it follows, I think, that it was the

¹² Words in italics are from Le Trosne's commentary.

necessity of struggling against the ever-present, common enemy – nature – which brought men together. They became aware that they struggled to better effect together, than separately. The evil is that they went past their goal. They were not content to conquer, they wanted to triumph; they were not content to bring down the enemy, they wanted to trample him underfoot. Whence came the plethora of artificial needs.

Make Nature a better mother and the earth satisfy all the needs of man, without demanding any work from him, and in an instant you will dissolve society. There will no longer be vice, nor virtue, nor attack, nor defence, nor laws.

Furthermore, if this is neither the first nor only cause of the formation of society, it is one cause without beginning or end.

LXXII

Men gathered together in society by instinct, just as weak animals form herds. There was certainly no kind of primitive agreement.

LXXIII

Wild dogs come together and hunt in a group; foxes do likewise. Isolated man could not have looked after his hut, prepared food, hunted, fought the animals, protected his herds, etc. Five men accomplish all these things, and do them well. The dog lying in wait has his nose; the greyhound has speed; the former will discover the hare, the latter will capture it.

A society should first of all be happy; and it will be so if liberty and property are assured; if trade is unrestricted; if all the orders of citizens are equally subjected to laws; if taxes are paid according to resources, or are well-distributed; if they do not exceed the needs of the state; if virtue and talents are well-rewarded.

But is it enough for a nation to be wealthy or happy? Imagine the people living in cottages, all busy cultivating the land. There would be no more than four estates: priests, magistrates, soldiers and cultivators.

But can a society not just be happy, but also brilliant? If liberty and property are assured, should a citizen not be allowed to use his wealth as he wants? Why do people become rich? Is it in order to be rich? It is

only to be happy. In what ways are we happy? Is it not by our pursuit of pleasures? What are pleasures? Some relate to the soul, others to the senses. So why should it not be permitted to use superfluous wealth for all these kinds of needs? Then there will be temples, squares, statues, paintings, gold and silver and silken fabrics, and even hoards of money, depending on whether or not the rich have taste. Then there will be vices; but what kind of vices? Every kind which nature inspires and fanaticism forbids. Then, too, there will be unhappy people – the stupid who do not work, the idle who do not want to work, the feckless and spendthrifts of all kinds – because a numerous society cannot be without its bad elements.

But let us see what is achieved by that rich man who does not directly return his surplus to the land. He makes his nation worth visiting for foreigners; he provides a livelihood for a large number of citizens who are consumers and who give a price to the fruits of the earth. In satisfying his own taste he increases the number of my pleasures.

If man is made only to work, harvest, eat and sell, all is well. But it seems to me that a creature who feels is made to be happy in all his thoughts. Is there any reason to put a limit to the mind and senses and say to man: You will only think so far, you will only feel so much? I confess that that kind of philosophy tends to keep man in a sort of mindlessness, at a moderate level of satisfaction and happiness which is contrary to his nature. And all philosophy contrary to man's nature is absurd. So is any system of law under which the citizen is continually forced to sacrifice his taste and happiness for the good of society. I want society to be happy but I also want the citizen to be happy, and there are as many ways of being happy as there are individuals. Our own happiness is the foundation of all our true duties.

The principle of the physiocrats carried to excess would condemn a nation to being no more than peasants.

LXXIV

[On the origin of sovereignty.]

My first thought is that it was merit which led to sovereignty. There was then a predominant quality: physical strength. And a predominant failing: idleness.

All these just and reasonable ideas – that members of society were

not made so by the leader, but vice versa, that there was a tacit contract, inalienable rights, freedom, property – are very recent in relation to the first establishment of society. They are the cry of oppressed man, the product of a long experience of evils resulting from the abuse of authority. When men asked what it was to be a man, or an individual asked what constituted a society, or a subject what made a sovereign, then reason was well advanced. On all these matters enlightenment in our time has been pushed as far as it can go. What has it produced? Nothing. In the midst of the complaints of all civilised peoples, from magistrates and *philosophes*, despotism has advanced on every front. We are still a very long way from the moment when edicts will open with the statement, 'Louis, or Frederick, or Catherine by the grace of their subjects', and not 'by the grace of God'. This innovation will immortalise the first sovereign who makes it.

By the grace of God, a theocratic phrase. *The anointed of the Lord*, another theocratic phrase. Phrases from a very ancient time, when the people lived under the domination of the priests. Then there was a priest-king. When these two heads separated, the priest still kept the privilege of consecrating the king, who was subjected to carrying the priest's livery. What does this ceremony mean, properly interpreted? This: *You only depend on God; be a tyrant if you wish*. See Samuel's speech to the people in the Bible.¹³

LXXV

There is only one way to prevent the abuses of serfdom, and its dangers: abolish serfdom and rule only over free men. That is hard to accomplish in a country where you cannot make the masters aware of the abuses of serfdom, nor the slaves aware of the advantage of freedom, so long as the first are despotic and the second brutalised.

LXXVI

[*The laws will do a great good in allowing serfs to possess some property.*] *To possess some property!* And why not as much money, movable and immovable property as the lords want to sell and the serfs can

¹³ I Samuel 12.

acquire? Alas! Too much time will elapse before these unfortunates can escape their poverty. A long time ago our peasants were able to acquire property and they are scarcely any better off for that. I admit that if you favour agriculture as much as it deserves the process will go faster; and so much the better, for as land is valued, so is man.

The first form of property is personal [i.e. freedom]. So that is what should be promised, and its acquisition encouraged, if it is not to be granted all at once.

LXXVII

[It is essential to try and avoid the causes which have so often led to the revolt of serfs against their masters.]

There is an excellent way of preventing the revolt of serfs against masters: there should be no serfs.

LXXVIII

There is only one way of encouraging the growth of population: it is to make the people happy. They proliferate, and remain wherever they are well; and they will be well wherever liberty and property are sacred. Liberty and property are sacred where everyone is subject equally to the laws and taxation, and where taxes are proportionate to the needs of society and collected according to people's wealth. For the rest, it is not necessary to get involved in anything more; everything is sufficiently catered for and will fall into place by itself.

One way of making a problem insoluble is to increase regulations. Do not govern too much.

LXXIX

It is a matter of experience that the poorer our peasants are, the more children they have. But fewer survive.

LXXX

[Land should be distributed to all families which do not have any, and the means to clear and cultivate it should be made available to them.] All that is very well. But if slavery lasts; if internal circulation is restricted on all

sides; if the lords continue their harassments; if the capital remains on the edge of the empire; if the lords, having functions which bind them to the court, are kept distant from their possessions and allow their houses to fall into ruin and their goods to become worthless; then how will this general disaster come to an end?

Land should be distributed to all families which do not have any, and the means to clear and cultivate it should be made available to them. Nothing could be wiser. But all this wisdom is wasted if that gift is made without emancipating the person and granting him ownership of the soil. These families must be sure of working for themselves and not for another; otherwise, the imposition of work is merely an increase in poverty.

LXXXI

Do not reward those who have too many children. Do not ban celibacy by law. If society is well-ordered, these two points will be taken care of without anyone interfering.

LXXXII

There is one method of encouraging agriculture, and only one: it is to make the work of the farmer the most essential of all occupations, and also the most happy.

I heard, yes, I personally heard this appalling stupidity spoken by a provincial Intendant, whom I could name: that the condition of a peasant was so painful that only extreme poverty or the fear of death could keep him in it. Public minister though he was, he still did not know that no danger or work frightens a man when he is compensated by the result; he still did not know that the best of occupations are those which people are eager to enter, and that people are always eager to enter one in which they are certain they will find prosperity and fortune, and that however hard the day of the farmer may be, agriculture will find as many hands as its rewards are certain and plentiful. He still did not know that all those people working in mines are not condemned to be there; and that children take over their father's spade, even though their salary may be very low and they rarely live beyond the age of thirty. But the mines are virtually the only

wealth of that district; you must be a miner or go abroad, and people become miners. It had never entered that minister's mind that in all professions the income which makes it possible to obtain help takes away the fatigue; and that callously to exclude the peasant from the class of landowners is to halt the progress of the first of the arts. Agriculture can never flourish while the person who digs the land is reduced to digging it for someone else. This brute of an Intendant ordered the cattle to be fattened and he cut back on the livelihood of the husbandman. He governed a province and knew nothing of man.

LXXXIII

[*It would be good to give prizes to the farmers who have cultivated their fields best.*] Ah! Do no such thing. Ensure that work brings its own reward and all will be achieved.

LXXXIV

[*Let the same apply to the workers who have done most for their industry.*] Ah! Do no such thing. Do not restrict industry, and it will advance of its own accord. Does a man of industry lack funds? Then give or lend them to him.

LXXXV

Books on agriculture are useful if they are written by an agriculturalist. Ensure that the farmer grows rich; once rich, he will try his hand at writing; richer still, perhaps he will write a book.

LXXXVI

The person who does not work regards himself as the sovereign of the person who does work, and he is right. For he does nothing and lives at the latter's expense.

Pride and vanity are poor means to action. They may spur on some individuals, but will never be national incentives. The national motive depends on man in general. All men want to be happy; some want to be praised.

LXXXVII

I cannot reconcile myself to these [physiocratic] ideas on luxury. I shall express my own ideas and leave the reader free to choose between the physiocrats and me. I will take things a bit further, but I shall be brief.

In every country where neither talents nor virtues lead to anything, gold will be god. It will be necessary to have gold or to pretend that you have it. Wealth will be the principal virtue, poverty the greatest vice. Those who have gold will display it in every conceivable way. If their luxury does not exceed their wealth, all is well. If it does, they will be ruined. There, the greatest fortunes will disappear in the blink of an eye. Those who have no gold will be ruined by their vain efforts to hide their poverty. And so there will be one kind of luxury, signifying the wealth of a small number, masking the poverty of the greater number, and corrupting everyone.

But imagine an excellent administration, great freedom of trade, agriculture protected, tax regulated according to the true needs of the state and equitably distributed – an affluent and happy nation. Then you will have a second kind of luxury, signifying wealth and prosperity at all levels. People do not eat gold; they use it for every kind of pleasure, and so there will be gilt objects, statues, and even hoards of money. No crimes arise from that, but only all the vices which make for happiness in this world and for damnation in hell.

The other kind of luxury, on the other hand, unites vices and crimes: the vices of opulence, the crimes of poverty.

Under bad luxury, people toil a lot, but only do bad work. Thus the decline of the sciences and of the liberal and mechanical arts. Under good luxury, people toil just as much; but they only do good work, because everyone is in a position to pay for it. There, the sciences and the liberal and mechanical arts flourish.

What then should the sovereign do? Everything possible to lead his subjects straight to damnation. And what else? Reduce gold to its just value by making sure that talents and virtue have their true reward. And how is that done? By opening up to competition the most important offices in the state. There are some classes of citizens in which competition determines rank; in these classes, all the places are taken by merit. From which I conclude that those who declaim against

luxury are right; and those who defend it are not wrong; but they are not speaking of the same luxury.

LXXXVIII

The person who has no capital and who works is as well off as the person who has an income of a hundred roubles without working. Yes, provided he is not liable to fall ill.

LXXXIX

Not everyone can be a farmer, not everyone can be a manufacturer. There is therefore a fixed proportion between the number of those who cultivate and the number of those who manufacture.

Let us imagine a state of affairs in which such a just proportion was established. Then, when a man is born, if he is made a manufacturer there will be one too many. If he is made a farmer, there will also be one too many. If he takes up an occupation in transport or trade, what will happen? He will be housed, fed and kept warm at the expense of those whom he has served. If they are foreigners, then you have a subject supported and even enriched at the expense of the foreigner, and that subject will contribute to the revenue and to all kinds of consumption.

It is a fact that there are two kinds of wealth: positive wealth, which only land ensures, and negative wealth (or necessary debts), which are those on which a man's life depends, paid for by someone else.

If, possessing the power of God, I could provide for an army without it costing anything to the nation, I would not produce anything, but I would make the nation rich out of everything which this debt or expense would have cost it. That is how, without producing anything, all those who belong to a nation and contribute to its taxes make it rich, while their industry supports them or enriches them at the expense of surrounding nations.

Those who do not cultivate and need to live, double and triple the work of the farmer. So it is manufacture which makes agriculture flourish and not agriculture which makes manufacture flourish.

If agriculture does not provide the raw material, manufacture cannot work. But if there is no manufacture, then agriculture will have no

interest in producing the raw material. People only work when they are certain of having buyers. Many workers, few buyers, no products. What is a farmer in relation to a manufacturer, and the manufacturer in relation to the farmer? One is a buyer and the other a seller of raw material.

XC

[Machines whose purpose is to reduce labour are not always useful. If something is moderately priced, and that suits both the buyer and the worker, machines which would simplify its manufacture would reduce the number of workers, and in a highly populated country be harmful.]

This remark stems from a failure to observe that labour or salaries in any country, whatever its population, cannot go down without the price of bread falling. As the price of bread sets the price for all things of prime necessity, it also fixes salaries. As a result, people have been afraid in case someone might die of hunger, and there is no occupation so slight that does not feed the man engaged in it.

[In several countries where everything is farmed out, the manner of administering finances destroys commerce by its injustices, harassments and excesses.] Great care needs to be taken when putting tax on a commodity. The increase in price always exceeds the quantity of the tax. Suppress the tax and the commodity will not return to its original price. A miserly financial operation produces an effect which the passing of twenty years can hardly repair. The seller is made to demand, and the buyer to pay, so much. An edict is necessary, to put a stop to this evil. Officers are needed, to put the edict into effect; that is to say, another evil worse than the first.

XCI

Customs. If customs duties are excessive there will be, and cannot but be, smuggling. Every danger has its price. All other things being equal, the customs should be fixed in such a way that the cost of the danger is virtually equal to the customs duties.

An important point to decide is whether to farm out the customs or to make them an affair of government. The tax-farmer ruins the king by his enormous profits, and he harasses all the subjects. The government officer does not harass the subjects, but through his negligence

ruins the sovereign just as much. He knows his lot, he cannot improve it by being more efficient and, moreover, he is inclined to favour his fellow-citizens at the expense of the king.

But could there not be a kind of government office, in which the position of the officer was such that he was able to improve it by his diligence? There is a danger that his diligence, in preserving the rights of the sovereign and bringing in more income, might turn into harassment. But it is on this second way of envisaging the welfare of the state that I will concentrate.

The government officer will never be as vigilant or as harsh as the tax-farmer. But the vigilance of the tax-farmer serves his profit, and that of the officer serves both his own profit and that of the national revenue.

When you consider this matter in depth, and see the amount of tax determined by the needs of the state, and, as a result, the necessity of finding on one side what has been lost on the other, you do not hesitate to prefer the officer to the tax-farmer and the second kind of officer to the first. Besides, when you examine every operation according to the principle of liberty and property, it is clear that the officer is even more preferable to the tax-farmer. For the more modest the position of the tax-farmer, the more greedy and restrictive he is, and the less the citizen is free. It is not so with the first kind of officer. As for the second kind, there is no doubt that, from this point of view, he does not suffer the disadvantages of the tax-farmer.

Furthermore, the severity of the law against misappropriation by tax-farmers, which in our country is in part a remedy against the drawbacks of tax-farming, would slightly reduce the drawbacks of the second kind of government officer. The tax-farmer would obviously have to be right to win his trial at the Court of Appeal. The officer would be even less favoured by this court than the tax-farmer, for a simple reason. The tax-farmer can lose. The officer can never do anything but profit; only his profit is more or less substantial. The worst he might suffer is an income no greater than his salary.

XCII

What restricts the trader does not for that reason restrict trade. This question and article of the Instruction should be examined by the physiocrats; I do not know enough about it.

I confess only that I share the prejudice that government should in no way interfere with trade, either by regulation or by prohibition, and that to restrict trade or trader is the same thing. But I prefer to leave this important discussion to those more enlightened, rather than involve myself in a very long series of arguments which would perhaps only be paralogisms. All I can see is that the notion of trade contains just two ideas – the import of foreign commodities and the export of native commodities, either raw or manufactured – and I do not understand how restricting these simple operations would not also restrict the trader; and how restricting the trader would benefit either trade in general or the two fundamental activities.

XCIII

The tariff of the customs at St Petersburg is in several respects absurd, as can be demonstrated by specific examples.

The errors come about through ignorance both of the value of things in themselves and of the value of things that are manufactured.

XCIV

Examine if the laws made to worsen the situation of those who handle the economy's trade, by only allowing them to rely on native commodities, are not as harmful to one nation as to another.

XCV

[On monopolies.]

There is only one instance in which it seems necessary to confine trade to a particular class of traders. It is when the trade of a nation takes place with a country which is far away; when there is no effective law in that country; when the trader is virtually in a continual state of war with its inhabitants; where there is a risk of his losing money he has advanced (if he has done so to manufacturers there), or the virtual certainty of having no work done, if no advances have been made; where these hazardous advances are very considerable; when the advances become more risky and considerable the more the price of the commodity increases. In such circumstances a very important and strong representative is needed to make these advances in safety, and

to demand the work already half paid for; his presence there, his wealth, his funds and his warehouses indicate that the work which has been ordered will not remain with the workman, and that in completing his work the rest of his salary will be paid out at once. But this manufacturer needs the protection and defence of those who engage him, in order to be able to work in peace. In other words, when things are precisely as they are in the case of trade in India, it would seem difficult to manage without a company supported by the ministry.

If the profits of the company are very great and enough for it to grow rich, it should be allowed to continue, but without any exclusive privilege. If consistent profitability demands a monopoly, that privilege should be granted to it. When the exclusivity of the French India Company was broken, it was thought that the seas would be covered with private ships. That has turned out to be false.

One reason which should be given great consideration is the difference between European manufacturers and Indian manufacturers. The latter are slaves, idle, and liable to be robbed at any moment. They only work when they are well guarded, and are absolutely sure of getting payment for their work.

XCVI

Russia has no trade mission in the large towns of Europe, no warehouse for her own commodities, no agent for the commodities of the European countries, no agent to facilitate trade. Such agents as she has in Russia are foreigners.

Among the barefoot Carmelites of Luxemburg there was a monk who made an excellent speculation. In his cell one day, instead of meditating on the vanity of the things of this world, and in spite of the Gospel's praise of poverty and the vow which he had taken about that, he dreamt of how he could grow rich.

It came into his mind to turn the house of his order in Paris, and all the houses spread throughout the kingdom and all the Catholic kingdoms, into so many trade missions. He succeeded. He made an immense fortune, and that fortune would have been unlimited if scruples had not intervened. The Fathers Superior ordered him to stop his trade. I only mention this fact to show the importance of trade missions.

XCVII

[On the economic doctrines of the physiocrats.¹⁴]

In the remarks on commerce there is a tendency to depreciate trade which seems to me excessive.

1. *In a farming nation there should be a greater or lesser number of individuals who have no other income than the salaries paid for by the nation which employs them and in the last resort by the nation for which they are employed. For whom do these salaries increase the price of food? For the buyer.*

2. *A merchant is not bound to the state by any tie.* I do not understand that. Everywhere a merchant is bound to the state by moral and physical ties. By the same moral bonds which attach a landowner to his country: we do not see merchants going to live abroad any more often than other citizens. By physical bonds: a reasonable merchant only acquires an asset in order to realise its value. The share of his wealth which he realises is the only one which he puts into securities. And there is no merchant who does not know that; as a result he has houses, furniture and land.

The very trade he performs attaches him to the soil. And it is not a matter of indifference to a merchant either to go from one branch of trade to another, or, in the same branch (that of oils, for example), to go from Marseilles to London or from London to Marseilles.

Like any other citizen, a merchant does not move from one place to another without real sacrifice (because all moving involves a loss), and without risking the credit he enjoyed where he was and which he has to re-establish in the place to which he goes. It is a terrible chain. I find it almost as strong as that of the landowner.

3. *It is true that a trading nation only exists through its trade in foreign products, but it is not like that with a merchant in a farming nation. He exists through the trade both of the products of his country and of foreign products. He is the trustee of the farmer, who cannot do everything at once without doing it badly, or else not at all.*

If you look at the matter closely, this is what you find: the land needs an owner, a farmer, servants, animals, manufacturers, traders, transporters, without which the quantity of available foodstuffs loses its value. All these agents are necessary and all should be encouraged.

¹⁴ Words in italics are quotations from, or paraphrases of, Le Trosne's commentary. The 'net product' (5) was the physiocratic term for agricultural surplus.

All the more so because it is impossible for any one of these classes of men, being linked to all the others, to be superfluous.

The state is a political body made up of different parts united by a common interest; this interest means that the parts cannot break away from the state without prejudice to themselves. The state seems to me to reside in the sovereign, the landowners, those who promote cultivation, and all those connected with this activity, each according to the rank he occupies. In order to attack the merchant the physiocrats make him into an abstract creature who does not exist anywhere. It is as a result of this abstraction that he has been treated as being inevitably cosmopolitan. To abuse the merchant as being the agent of several nations at the same time is to abuse the air and water because of their general utility; it is to lose sight of the common good of the universe.

It seems to me that it would not be difficult to praise the merchant in the same terms as those used against him. He belongs to all nations. So much the better: all nations therefore have an equal interest in protecting him. He makes no distinction of persons, whether he is buying or selling. So much the better: partiality would restrict his position. All the meadows speak in favour of the merchant. Only the meadow which the farmer cultivates speaks for him.

Finally, however, this merchant settles somewhere. When he dies, he leaves his safe in some country on earth. And experience shows us that this country is his homeland, the place where all his family live. They claim and recover his fortune, in whatever corner of the world it has been deposited. So it is not correct to say that every country means the same to him, and that he means the same to every country.

4. *If the state urgently needs resources, the money of a native merchant would be lent at the same rate of interest as the money of a foreign merchant.* You will regard the landowner as more disinterested. Say, rather, that he can be more easily attacked, which is an advantage only for the tyrant. But such are the effects of commerce that it silences all national and religious prejudices in the light of that general interest which should be the bond between all men.

5. *The net product is the only available wealth.* But everyone in his own way struggles against this net product: the cattle in eating as much as they can; the servant in getting his salary raised; the manufacturer in demanding the best price he can obtain for his labour; the merchant in demanding as much as possible for his intermediary function; and

the transporter does not go to the market any worse off than the others. The cattle and the merchant enter equally into the category of costs.

Here are two agents of exchange, one native, the other foreign, both needing an intermediary agent. The latter takes 10 per cent from both. That done, what happens? The 10 per cent which he has taken from his compatriot remains in the country; it has only changed pockets. The 10 per cent which he had taken from the foreigner, whether in money or in commodities, increases the national wealth, which is no more than the sum of the goods of those who constitute the nation. From which it can be seen that it is not a matter of indifference whether the intermediary agent is foreign or native. I am well aware that if you put a foreign intermediary agent in competition with one who is native, the latter will lower the price; but this operation would not be for the best. Taking everything into account, it seems to me that it is better for the intermediary agent to be paid more by the two men of exchange and for him to be your subject.

XCVIII

The sovereign should make the administrator of his household stick to his job. He should not be a manufacturer or entrepreneur of any kind. That would make him the most terrible monopolist, for a thousand reasons which it is unnecessary to spell out.

XCIX

A court for commerce should be made up of merchants; just as any other court should be made up of substantial landowners. You can be sure of fairness, when the judge himself would be the victim of his own sentence.

C

There is one important standpoint in commercial procedure. It is to take precaution against the loss caused by the lapse of time.

CI

[The English Magna Carta forbids seizure of a debtor's land or revenue while his personal goods or property are enough to meet his debts and he offers them as such.]

No one should forget the terrible effect of the seizure or appropriation of property, etc. A debtor should keep the enjoyment of his goods until his debts are paid up. A fixed period will be given for the creditors to make their case. Once this time has elapsed, they will be debarred from any claim. This situation will be decided not by the judiciary, but by the representatives of the creditors themselves. Seizure of goods and the termination of use of them will not take place until after this decision has been made. The enjoyment of the land will be put up to auction. The price of the bid will fix the length of the seizure, etc.

CII

[On the uncertainty caused by the alteration of currency.]

This uncertainty only lasts a moment. Why is currency altered? It is the action of a bankrupt state. It is to pay for a pound of gold with half a pound of gold. It is a theft. Now, all theft ruins the person concerned. So this is to ruin the nation.

What is the effect of this alteration?

1. To take the old money out of circulation. People bury it; it disappears.
2. To have it taken away by the foreigner who, becoming a forger, pays your subjects the pound of gold which he owed them with just half a pound.

Paper money should be considered in relation to the individual and the nation. The nation that does not know how to apportion the quantity of paper which it creates to the specie risks ruining itself and half its citizens.

The individual merchant is in the same situation if he puts everything into commodities.

CIII

[On the harmful effect of restricting the movement of money across state frontiers.]

All that you have said about this is excellent. Why have you done the opposite?

Let us add a word about beautiful coinage. Buildings fall down, marble crumbles, bronze is destroyed. Thousands of years after a nation has ceased to exist, this coinage is found in the ground and excavated. So it must be beautiful, because it leaves behind the good or bad taste of a nation.

After the coinage, it is the buildings which last the longest. It is therefore desirable that those who preside over public buildings should be versed in the principles of architecture and be familiar with the beautiful remains of the monuments of antiquity. A great and beautiful building does not only honour a people, it brings them profit.

CIV

Russia has metals, but neither foundry, wireworks nor nail factory. Her metals are exported and brought back manufactured. She has sheet-metal factories. Her sheet-metal is taken away and brought back as manufactured tin.

Lace, porcelain and mirrors should either be banned, or crushed with taxes, or, what is best, be manufactured in Russia.

Russia has factories of mirrors, founded at great expense, but badly run and unaided by the state. She has factories of porcelain, about which I would say the same thing. These enterprises are entrusted, under government protection, to fools and rogues. You want freedom of foreign trade, but exclusive rights are sold to the English and the Dutch. So everything increases in price. What I say about imports of commodities should also be understood to apply to exports of foodstuffs.

I have spoken elsewhere of the causes of the increase in price of native or foreign commodities, which are sold and consumed in the country.

Goods are taken on credit and not paid for. It is not possible to have payment made, either on the account-books or a banknote or a bill of

exchange. I committed the sovereign to make clear the condition of the bills of exchange which were the subject of protest. This led to considerable sums being paid. I would like it if among the outstanding bills of exchange she would take care of the settlement of those which were good, except those of debtors who are solvent but acted in bad faith.

The person who pays in cash pays for the others; the latter pay a high price for the commodity, because they are sure of not being forced to pay.

The person who would give a low price to the buyer who paid in cash would be ruined, because the Russians prefer to buy four to five times above the value and not pay.

There is yet another vice. That is the misappropriation of those in subordinate positions who take away provisions of all kinds from the suppliers. They pay for their homes at the expense of other citizens.

I do not know what to say on this article.

CV

In Russia the military hospitals are dreadful. In them soldiers die on a plank of wood with practically no attention. There are no homes for the disabled, so far as I know. There are no public hospitals. A poor man dies on a bench, in a cottage, wrapped up in his miserable coat, without any medicine or even food. It is for a doctor to speak about the practice of medicine.

CVI

It is impossible to give a general education to a large population. I do not know of any people, however numerous, which cannot have small schools where the children from poor homes can be fed and have lessons in reading, writing, arithmetic, and the moral and religious catechism. I do not know of any people which cannot have public schools for drawing, colleges for boarders and day students, boarders and holders of grants.

Do you want lots of pupils and bad teachers? The state must pay the teachers. Do you want fewer pupils and excellent teachers? The teachers must be paid by the pupils.

I would like discipline to be exercised in the colleges. I would say

the same of our own schools. The magistrate should administer it; he should take an oath from the teacher to speak the truth, and those who are incompetent should be sent back to their families and their professions. In twenty years you would lose perhaps one man of genius, but you would prevent the loss of a large number of young people leaving the colleges in a vicious, idle and ignorant condition, fit for nothing except to be actors, soldiers and criminals.

I admit that these remarks apply only to a free country where there is a third estate.

Moreover, the most important education is that of those who will succeed to the empire. That is not the concern only of their father and mother, but of the nation. The bad education of an ordinary child makes him unhappy. The bad education of the children of kings makes a whole nation unhappy.

Everything which surrounds them exudes corruption. It attacks their heart and mind through all the senses at the same time. How could they be sensitive to poverty, if they do not know or experience it? How could they be friends of the truth, if their ears have only ever been touched by the sounds of flattery? Or admirers of virtue, if brought up in the midst of worthless slaves, who are solely concerned to praise their tastes and desires? Or to be patient in adversity, which does not always show them respect? Or resolute in danger, to which they may one day be exposed, after they have been weakened by indulgence and continually deluded about the importance of their own existence? How could they appreciate the services done for them, how could they know the value of the blood shed for the protection of their empire or for the magnificence of their reign, if they are imbued with the fatal prejudice of supposing that everything is due to them, and that no honour is so great as that of dying for them? Being strangers to all ideas of justice, how would they not end up as the scourge of that part of the human race whose happiness has been entrusted to them?

Fortunately, sooner or later their depraved teachers are punished by the ingratitude or contempt of their pupils. Fortunately, these pupils, miserable in the midst of splendour, are tormented all their lives by a profound boredom which they cannot drive away from their palace. Fortunately, the gloomy silence of their subjects instructs them from time to time of the hatred which is felt for them. Fortunately, they are too cowardly to hold it in disdain. Fortunately,

the religious prejudices which have been sown in their soul return and tyrannise them. Fortunately, after a life which no mortal, not excluding the least of their subjects, would wish to have if he knew all its misery, they find dark anxiety, terror and despair crouching beside them as they are dying.

CVII

Inspire love of the country. How can one hope that a father will inspire his child with love for a country which he does not love himself? I therefore say to sovereigns: 'If you want fathers to preach love of the country to their children, make the country lovable for the fathers.' It is an emotion which is easy to engender, because in all men there is an inclination to love their country which depends more on moral causes than on physical principles. The natural taste for society; the ties of blood and friendship; the familiarity of the climate and the language; that bias which we so easily adopt for the place, *mœurs* and kind of life to which we are accustomed. All these bonds attach a reasonable creature to the places where he received life and education. It needs powerful motives for him to break these ties all at once, and to prefer another land where everything will be strange and new to him.

CVIII

Let there be only one law, one principle against the emigration of men and money. There is, or can be, an emigration of men without emigration of money. The emigration of money is a symptom of the mistrust and disrepute of the state and of individuals.

CIX

Attach large fees to the functions of the nobility, and grant them ranks of precedence, honorary distinctions, statues, etc. But give them none of those privileges which distinguish them in courts of law or which free them from taxation. The law and taxes should make exception for no one, not even a prince of the blood. This is the only way to correct hereditary nobility.

Keep honorary distinctions without being prodigal with them; above all, never confer them as a favour. An equitable sovereign

grants no favours. If you look at the matter closely, you will see that every favour is an injustice in disguise. With respect to the most indifferent favours, it presupposes that there is not one man in the whole empire worthy of preference.

CX

If the minister is without honour, the nation will soon be without honour. His behaviour often leaves its mark on the behaviour of individuals in general.

If the minister creates life-annuities he abolishes all ties of blood between the subjects. He brings about the worst which bad luxury can bring – bad luxury being the sign of the wealth of a small number and the brand of poverty for most. Or else the life-annuities of the chosen individuals (as well as others) become a matter of speculation for bankers, which is very burdensome for the state.

The motive of self-interest must never be joined to honorary distinctions. Gold spoils everything it touches. If there is a gold purse hung on the end of a medal, people will soon be ambitious for the medal only for the sake of the purse. For the same reason that interest must be kept apart from honour, marks of honour should be difficult to obtain. As soon as they are commonplace, they are worth nothing.

CXI

Of the middle condition, [the third estate]. It upsets me to see here that people engaged in crafts and professions are preferred to the peasants, without whom those people would die of hunger, lacking bread, and their children would die of thirst, lacking milk.

CXII

[Since the institution of the middle condition will have as its aim good mœurs and the love of work, it follows that the abuse of duties laid down to achieve this will be followed by exclusion from that order.]

The abuse of duties. No duties should be prescribed except submission to the laws.

Will be excluded from this order. I do not understand that. Will someone be made a serf?

CXIII

I imagine two neighbouring nations: A and B. If the inhabitants on the border of empire A are so far away from the capital or the centre of consumption that they cannot take their produce there, and are so close to the capital or centre in empire B that they have all their trade with B, then I see them continually going from their region to B and never going from their region to A. They will be called by the name A but will really be subjects of B. So there can be empires covering too large an area. However large empires are, their centre should be the true place of communication. The frontier is the proper site for defence and exchange. The larger the empire, the easier internal circulation should be, the more towns there should be, and the more large towns. It is the large towns which create market towns; market towns create villages; villages create hamlets. It is this distribution which gives shape and substance to an empire.

CXIV

The correct location for warehouses is on the frontier, whether they are warehouses of native commodities for export, or warehouses of foreign commodities for import.

CXV

The manufacture of materials native to the country should be close to the warehouses.

CXVI

I am very surprised to find uncertainty here about the evil of guilds. I will say only one word on this.

A guild is an exclusive privilege which condemns the person who knows how to work to do nothing, to be a thief, or to die in hunger. If that worker has ability, he will grow rich; if he has none, he will be poor. The public alone should be judge of his ability.

CXVII

[The order of inheritance derives from the principles of political or civil right, not from those of natural right.]

I admit that, strictly speaking, the order of inheritance does not derive from natural right. Nevertheless, a man who gives birth to a child seems to me obliged to make him happy, so far as it is within his power. In this respect, the child has a right to a share of his fortune while he is alive, and, after his death, more rights to his inheritance than anyone else in the world. Nevertheless, if the grandfather leaves to his son both what he received from his father and what he had acquired himself, it seems that the father owes his child that part of the fortune which he inherited and of which he was only the trustee. It is virtually a debt, and that debt seems to me so sacred that my child would have had to make an attempt on my life before I could imagine being free from paying it. Both the master who seizes the inheritance of his serf, and the sovereign who grabs the inheritance of one of his subjects, commit an act of tyranny.

A father, in his capacity as father, owes nourishment and education to his child; and he owes him, as son and heir of his grandfather, at least part of the income of his fortune.

The law can make provision immediately for this income, and that would be one of the most powerful remedies for the idleness and incapacity of fathers.

The law could make this share inalienable, as belonging to a minor. In this way it would guard against a kind of artificial cruelty to children, who enjoy nothing during the life of their fathers and secretly long for their deaths. The law would likewise encourage marriages and population, above all in times of luxury when parents are liable to prefer the splendour of their homes to the support of their children.

The fathers and mothers could in their bequests only dispose of the goods which they had themselves acquired.

There is a law in Holland which allows two partners to make a will after their marriage. Each can dispose of his or her goods as he or she pleases. This law seems able to produce two great results: to stop (through self-interest) the tendency to infidelity, and to keep the children's respect for their parents. If there is any brake to loose behaviour, that is it. Even the most wayward husbands are more cautious and respectable as a result. When virtue is absent we must be

content with the hypocrisy which pays homage to it. The children of hypocritical fathers are pious.

The more restrained the women, the less frivolous the young.

CXVIII

The best way to divide up large fortunes and to encourage political equality among the citizens is to share wealth between the children, or, where there are no children, among the collateral descendants.

Collateral inheritances bring more families out of poverty than enrich others with excess.

All reasonable men, whom pride or prejudice have not corrupted, abhor the absurd right of primogeniture, which transfers the entire patrimony of a house to the eldest son. The latter is corrupted by it, as his brothers and sisters are thrown into poverty by it, punished as if by chance for the crime of having been born a few years too late. A head of a family is only a trustee and a trustee should never be allowed to divide the trust unequally among the interested parties who have an equal right. If, as he was dying, a savage left two bows and two children, and he was asked what should be done with these two bows, would he not reply that one should be given to each child? And if he bequeathed both to the same child, would he not give people to understand that the neglected child was the fruit of his wife's misbehaviour? In areas where this monstrous dispossession is authorised, the father is the least respected person in the family; he is respected neither by the eldest child from whom he can take nothing away, nor by the younger children to whom he can give nothing. Filial tenderness is destroyed. It is succeeded by a feeling of inferiority which, from the cradle onwards, inspires three or four children with the habit of crawling at the feet of one other child. The latter takes on a personal importance which hardly ever fails to make him insolent. Decent fathers and mothers are afraid to increase around them the number of impoverished souls condemned to celibacy. The whole inheritance is placed in the hands of a madman whose dissipations are only stopped by entail, which is another evil. Such great disasters make one assume that the right of primogeniture, which superstition did not originally bless, and which despotism has no interest in perpetuating, will sooner or later be abolished. It is a relic of feudal barbarism which our descendants will one day blush to remember.

CXIX

Regulations about guardianship are a very difficult matter and the only solid objection to divorce.

A stranger in the family is a bad guardian; so too is a relative. A magistrate is the worst guardian. If both parties are agreed in objecting to all of these, who then should choose? The priests?

In the Instruction of Her Imperial Majesty there is nothing about divorce. Yet I would not be embarrassed to defend it by natural law, by the harmful effects of indissoluble marriages. But I would like the two partners to be able to remarry; otherwise, divorce leads two creatures to debauchery. But whom will we appoint as guardians of the children? I have no idea. The Orphanage in Moscow? Why not?

Divorce was allowed among the Romans, and was infrequent. It keeps partners to their duties; it favours good *mœurs* and the growth of population; it has its limit in the division of income to the children.

But is it necessary that the two partners should plead for divorce at the same time? If the answer is yes, then divorce will be rarer. It is the consent of the partners which makes a marriage, a union of which the law approves, which it announces, and which the priest blesses. In Switzerland there are sensible laws about divorce. They all tend to preserve good *mœurs*.

CXX

The matter of the laws is best divided into natural laws, civil laws, which should be consequences of natural laws, and procedure.

The number of natural laws and their consequences, that is, the civil laws, is very extensive. For it must be noted that if a civil law is not a consequence of a natural law, it is an arbitrary law and, as a result, useless and harmful.

If the people is the true legislator, it is the true reformer of the laws.

CXXI

[In a law, when exceptions, limitations and modifications are unnecessary, it is much better not to include them.]

But when a law does include exceptions, limitations or modifica-

tions, what should a judge do in a case which comes under some unspecified exception, limitation or modification?

CXXII

[The style of the laws should be concise and simple; direct expression is always better understood than pedantic expression.]

In the vast mass of different interests which binds or separates nations, which in one nation binds or separates individuals, I do not know if the Code can ever be as short, simple and clear a work as you imagine. On this matter I appeal to the Instruction of Her Imperial Majesty for the Making of the Laws. I do not ask who is the person who could enter into more detail, but I ask where, among all civilised nations, is the man of the people who can understand all its articles? Yet this Instruction is conceived in the simplest and clearest terms.

I will add a short remark here. It is that there is scarcely a problem in integral and differential calculus which is not easier to solve than a problem of political economy, if you expect a moderately rigorous solution. There is no possible question in mathematics which the genius of Newton or some of his successors has not been able to promise to resolve. I would not say as much about the subjects which concern us here. At first sight you think you only have one difficulty to work out, but soon this difficulty involves another, that a third, and so on, all the way to infinity. And you find that you must either abandon the work or all at once take into account the immense system of the social order, for fear of only obtaining an incomplete and faulty result. The data and the calculation vary according to the nature of the area, its products, its capital, resources, relationships, laws, practices, taste, commerce and *mœurs*. Who can be so informed as to be able to grasp all these elements? What mind can be so balanced as to be able to appreciate them just for what they are worth?

All the knowledge of the different branches of society forms the branches of the tree which constitutes the science of the public man. There is the knowledge of the ecclesiastic, the military, the magistrate, the financier, the merchant, the farmer. There are the likely advantages and obstacles which must be weighed up, the passions, rivalries, particular interests. With all the enlightenment you can acquire without genius, with all the genius you can have received

without enlightenment, you will only make mistakes. After that, is it astonishing that so many errors are attributed to the people (who only repeat what they have heard), to those who speculate (allowing themselves to be carried away by a desire for systematisation and not hesitating to derive a general truth from a few isolated successes), to businessmen (all more or less obedient to the routine of their predecessors, and all more or less held back by the ruinous consequences of attempting something outside the usual practice), to state officials (who obtained their important posts as a result of noble birth and protection and who, because of their profound ignorance, are at the mercy of corrupt officials in lower positions who deceive them or lead them astray)?

In every well-ordered society there should be no subject which cannot be aired freely. The more serious and difficult it is, the more important that it be discussed. Now, is there anything more important or complicated than government? So what better thing could you do for a court which loves truth than to encourage every mind to be concerned with that? And what judgement would you be entitled to make of that court which banned such a study, except mistrust of its operations or the certainty that its decisions were bad? Would it not be correct to describe this kind of restriction as follows: *the sovereign forbids anyone to show him that his minister is an idiot or a rogue. For it is his will that the minister may be one or the other without anyone drawing attention to that fact.*

Matters of political economy need to be considered for a long time before they become clear. And in spite of the difficulty of reaching a definite solution, that should always be your goal. You should try to come as close to such a solution as you can. Hope for more time and more education, and pray to God that he will suspend a law of nature; namely, not to submit us to a long series of madmen, idiots, idlers, criminals and rogues surrounded by an impenetrable barrier of other rogues, while we wait for the birth of a person who is worthy of occupying the throne.

CXXIII

It is not enough that everyone can understand the laws. It is necessary that everyone can know them. Laws which are common to all conditions should be taught from childhood. Woe to the person who, when

he is grown up, does not become informed about the laws relating to his situation.

CXXIV

[In Rome an insolent man gave a slap in the face to everyone he met and gave them the pound coin prescribed by law for this offence.] If this man had only administered one slap he would not have been too insolent. For his action would only have been the criticism of a bad law.

CXXV

[The corruption of every government almost always begins with the corruption of its principles.]

To the extent that a people loses its feeling for liberty and property it becomes corrupt and base, and tends towards slavery. Once it is a slave it is lost; it no longer thinks of itself as the owner even of its own life. No longer is there a precise idea of what is just and unjust. Without the fanaticism which inspires it with hatred for other countries, it would no longer have a homeland. Everywhere that this fanaticism no longer exists, the nobility think of going abroad; and the poor are only held back by the stupidity which numbs them. They are like unfortunate dogs in search of the house where they were beaten and badly fed.

CXXVI

[On the exercise of power.]

I am inclined to think that there is no instance in which power can exceed without cost the limits which have been imposed on it.

It is an injury done to the intermediate powers. It is a first seed of distrust sown by the sovereign. It is a bad example given to his successor. The more serious the case and the more the monarch leaves the decision to the intermediate powers, then the greater will be the confidence he will inspire in his word and moderation, and the more respect he will inspire for those powers.

CXXVII

One of our ambassadors to the Porte¹⁵ invited a Kadi to dinner. In the middle of dinner a messenger came up to the Kadi and whispered something in his ear. He got up, went out and only reappeared a quarter of an hour later. The ambassador asked him what business had called him. The Kadi answered: 'I was advised that a baker was selling his bread short; so I had myself taken to him. His bread was weighed; it was found to be short. His oven was still alight. I had him seized and thrown into it, and the job was done.' Hearing this, everyone was struck with fear. The Kadi added, 'It is more than a hundred years since that happened. For a hundred years from now it will not be done again. His theft was a public theft from the most unfortunate part of the people, those who buy their bread by the pound. You have the man who robs the safe of a financier broken on the wheel, and you do not want me to have burnt the man who steals bread from the poor? This penalty is more important than you think. And the crime is too easy to commit with impunity not to use all the fear of punishment against it.'

The person who thinks that you can read the wisdom of a people in the history or collection of its laws is making a big mistake. Everything has been anticipated, arranged and ordered, but nothing has been done. At the time when Rome only had its Twelve Tables it had *mœurs*. At the time when that enormous and admirable body of civil right was compiled, Rome no longer had any *mœurs*.

CXXVIII

[*Men assembled in society have many more needs than man in isolation.*]
That is true, but what follows from it?

1. That a good sovereign is only a faithful steward.
2. That a steward who demands from his master more than his house needs, is stealing from his master.
3. And that in a well-ordered house there are no thieves who cannot be, and who ought not to be, brought to justice.

Principles are easily laid down; but do you have the courage to draw the consequences?

¹⁵ The Porte was the government of the Ottoman Empire.

CXXIX

[On defence and the need for soldiers.]

I do not know how these matters are settled. It is military reserves who kill tyrants in despotic states, and who put the people in chains in free states. By means of a strip of land let nature unite two countries, France and England, now divided by water. At the very moment that England will need a national army, the sovereign will be (or will become) the head of that army. It is he who will make all the appointments; and at the first sign he gives, all the soldiers will become so many men disposed to put their fathers, mothers and fellow-citizens in chains, even to kill them. I can therefore speak equally to despots and free peoples, and say to them: 'You will always be insecure on your throne; you will always be in chains, forever left to the whim of either a crazy child or a wild beast, if you do not know how to take some reasonable measure against this body of men, drawn from your homes in order to bear arms against you and subjugate you.' What I say is perhaps a political dream, but so what? I know at least that if I had been the legislator of northern America, that is what would have been done.

The sequence of events always brings a moment when it is desirable that all the subjects of an empire should have been brought up to be soldiers. When two or three major battles have been lost, a state is defenceless. It would not be so if the art of war became part of the national education. What power would dare to attack a society which always had men springing up to defend it? In a country where all men are soldiers the military would form the whole nation and would necessarily be loyal to it. It would no longer be a case of the nation using the military against its leader, or of the sovereign using it against the nation. The nation would be free and would always remain so. It would no longer be a question of a standing army. It would no longer be a question of weakening the whole of society in order to support this standing army. It would no longer be a question of taking precautions to have a sufficient number of men available in reserve.

By their condition, all men would be what they ought to be: always available when the common good was in danger. This availability would sometimes take precedence over their civil functions. But nothing could be more right. If, in spite of that, it was felt there was a need for a body of permanent militia, this body would be less

numerous. And it would be continually renewed; because all the subjects of the state, officers and soldiers, would each have their turn, their time of service.

I shall not elaborate on the difference between this nation and all nations as they are today, on the difference between this militia and a militia as it is everywhere constituted. I will deal with this difference only as it concerns public liberty. In this regard, choose whatever kind of government suits you, and you will be free if you have two sets of clothes – that of a magistrate, doctor, merchant, and that of a soldier. It is in this second set of clothes that you will go to make your representations, in good order, your sword at your side, and your rifle with its bayonet on your shoulder. Your representations will be heard, because they will be at point-blank range. Take as your models the Swiss, and you will be as free as they are.

CXXX

[Physiocrats criticise the person who uses his freedom for his own enjoyment,] *who is content not to do wrong, and prefers the pleasure of satisfying his own inclination or whim to that of doing the public good.*¹⁶

That is not correct. You should not say, 'Who is content not to do wrong', but rather, 'Who is content not to do the greatest good and who prefers to reconcile public good and his individual satisfaction.' The person who has built a beautiful and magnificent building makes use of the materials and men of the country; he embellishes the nation. These embellishments attract foreigners, who stay in the town and spend huge sums there, because those who travel are generally powerful men accompanied by large retinues. Take away the palaces, ruins and paintings of modern Italy and you would fill it with poverty. It is the splendour of ancient Rome which, at the expense of every other nation, supports modern Rome. Colbert spent millions on a carousel which earned two or three times what it cost. If you had used all that the Medici Venus and the Apollo Belvedere have cost the curious, you would have gold a hundred times over. If the paintings of Raphael had been covered with what the English, French and Germans have left around these masterpieces, there would have been half a foot of gold on them. If, instead of that tumbledown building at the

¹⁶ Words in italics are from Le Trosne's commentary.

bottom of Faubourg Saint-Marceau (which houses the natural history collection), there were constructed a haven or tomb worthy of nature, you would meet the expense with what it produced. If we followed the physiocrats our homes would be covered with matting, and our towns full of cottages surrounded by good fortifications. Yet the manufacture of the Gobelins costs our neighbours more than it costs us. If Italian musicians are ruinously expensive, it is not so for Italy, and nobody would suggest that the Conservatoire in Naples should be shut down. It is not building an opera house that is stupid, but building one so cheaply and poorly that no one condescends to look at it. I am strongly in favour of someone building a beautiful theatre, but if it cannot compare with the ancient Coliseum it will bring no return. It is money without interest. When the fine arts, eloquence, history, poetry, painting, sculpture and architecture are animated by national wealth they will produce great things; and when they all contribute to bring renown to virtues and talents, they will make the nation better.

A good citizen is not one who is content not to do wrong, but one who does good. An excellent citizen is one who does the most good; and if the greatest good is to turn all your surplus merely to reproduction, I confess that I would not want to live in such society, and that if I were away from it I would hardly be tempted to come and look at it. With affluence, the taste for comforts increases. Little by little this taste moves towards extreme affectation. On the way it produces things which are beautiful and not without some use. For the beautiful is never separate from the useful. I do not wish to stop this progress. If the limit of the useful is mere reproduction, and if this limit cannot be crossed without ceasing to be good, all mathematics would be reduced to four pages, all mechanics to six propositions, all hydraulics to two experiments, all astronomy to nothing, all physics to the study of manure, all science to political and domestic economy; all the fine arts would be suppressed or reduced to Chinese coarseness, all manufactures restricted to work on materials of basic necessity. These notions, taken as far as good logic can pursue them, have put Rousseau's man on all fours and the physiocrats' man at the end of a plough. The former, with all his good intentions, has never seen beyond the edge of his parish. The latter have forgotten one of their great principles, which is that when everything else is well ordered, things settle at a certain level. Put in good order two or three important things, and leave the rest to the self-interest and taste of individu-

als. Above all, be careful not to take cause for effect or effect for cause. It is not the fine arts which have corrupted *mœurs*; it is not the sciences which have depraved men. Study history well and you will see that, on the contrary, the corruption of *mœurs* was brought about by quite different causes and always led in turn to the corruption of taste, the deterioration of the fine arts, the contempt for the sciences, ignorance, stupidity and barbarism – not that out of which the nation originally emerged, but that from which it will now never escape.

The first kind of barbarism is that of people who do not yet have their eyes open; the second is that of people who have had their eyes put out.

CXXXI

[*On what things should taxes be imposed?*] The comments on this article tend to reduce all taxes to a single land tax. I admit that my ideas on this important subject are not yet clear.

I see only that:

1. If taxes are not restricted to produce, they call for long and difficult measures and, first of all, a general survey. How do you make a general survey? Of France, for example? How do you make one good enough to serve as a measure for taxation? Even when well done it is subject to continual changes.
2. A single tax on land gives the sovereign a title as general co-owner; and that makes me angry for the rest of time.
3. This method involves a perfect knowledge of all a subject's means. But I do not mind if there is plenty of hidden wealth. The person who does not calculate twenty bad sovereigns for one good one, makes a bad calculation. All political speculation should be subordinated to the laws of nature. Without that, although it may have some temporary benefit, in the long run it will be fatal.

CXXXII

[*How should taxes be made less onerous for the people?*] This article is very fine. It is clear that neither the quality of the tax nor its distribution should be arbitrary, either on the part of the revenue or on the part of the taxpayer.

But how can we be safe from the arbitrary power of the revenue,

through greed or eagerness, with its four hundred thousand hands to take from us and just as many to do us in. Everything always comes back to the great difficulty of limiting the sovereign authority.

A single tax is the most fatal of all if it does not apply equally to all. Make this apply, if you can, to the aristocracy, the nobility, the military, the magistrates and the Church. I address my remarks to a Frenchman: try to reduce all social states to one level.

One of the advantages of many taxes, as we have, is that while pressed on one side I am relieved on another. From time to time some of these taxes are done away with, and sometimes the most onerous are the first to come to an end.

Besides, a single tax cannot be altered without immediately putting a whole nation into despair. Should a madman be exposed to this madness? With a stroke of a pen you will see how far this single tax can be pushed. Should we, can we, authorise a tyrant to bring us to this point without ill effect? If you can guarantee me a long sequence of wise kings, I will agree to the single tax. If you cannot do that, allow me my opinion and my distrust of such a fine idea.

There is a policy which is best according to a thing in itself, and one which is best in relation to persons and places. The land tax or direct tax is certainly the best in itself. But is it best in relation to individuals, under a hereditary government in which the throne passes to a despotic and wicked child?

The single and direct tax is marvellously well-suited to pure democracy. Is it well-suited to monarchy? And other kinds of government?

CXXXIII

In all cases avoid monopoly. I think that no law should be made prohibiting monopoly. An individual has the right to buy all the grain in a province, if he has the means. Monopoly is only dangerous in two circumstances. The first is when it is performed by the sovereign. The second is when it becomes an exclusive privilege of some protected individual. All this examination of exclusive privileges and monopolies is true; it is a major scourge. The most favourable instance of exclusive privilege is that in which the inventor has spent his life and fortune in research on his invention; then it becomes an absolute necessity that society buys the invention.

Question: should a nation make public a useful invention which it alone possesses?

CXXXIV

The arbitrary character of tax on persons and tradeable goods has been clearly shown. But it seems to me that the matter of consumption has been superficially treated.

Consumption is a taxation which is:

1. free;
2. quite equitable, because people consume according to their wealth, or else they do not use their wealth;
3. very general, because it extends over all kinds of wealth, so that even the minister is subject to it.

I do not intend to defend taxes on consumption, but I would like their injustice to be made more clear, and in particular their influence on the condition of the peasant.

CXXXV

[On internal trade.]

Raise all barriers to internal circulation and external exchange. Protect commerce, favour it without interfering with it. No sovereign will ever understand the interests of trade as well as the merchant. The price of foodstuffs establishes itself. Agriculture, population and trade depend on one another indivisibly. Their rise and their fall are the result of a single cause. Do not kick the hive; let the bees work in peace.

CXXXVI

I do not know if the distinction between the national merchant and the nation as merchant is well-founded. Under the current state of taxation it seems to me clear that either the revenue or the taxpayers gain. In every state of taxation it seems to me that the rich merchant drinks, eats, sells, buys, builds, populates and so on, and that in all these respects his wealth is part of the national wealth.

CXXXVII

I can only imagine a nation getting rich by trade when:

1. it lacks nothing;
2. it enjoys, exclusively, one commodity which it alone trades;
3. it has a surplus of this commodity.

A necessary corollary of this advantage is that all industry will be applied to this one commodity, and its work and efforts will be restricted elsewhere to absolute necessity. An example which is not fanciful is that it will even neglect one kind of production completely if the efforts devoted to the single commodity bring in more than divided efforts.

A mind which was vast enough to grasp all the relations between nations, as they exchange with one another, would see at each moment the real price of something, whatever that was. This part of the globe is only a huge, enormous market, where everything occurs on a large scale, like in a church fair on a small scale. There are only three elements to combine: the greater or lesser quantity of goods, the smaller or larger numbers of sellers, and the smaller or larger number of buyers, which are two kinds of competition opposed to one another.

Just as a nation owns a certain amount of agricultural produce, so it also owns a certain amount of industrial production.

Either you do not have the thing and you are poor; or you have it and do not know how to manufacture it, and that is just as if you were poor; or you manufacture it less well than a neighbouring nation, and that is still to your disadvantage. It is almost as if your soil provided it in less good condition.

CXXXVIII

Everything represents money, as money represents everything. The idea that you can regard money as an intermediary security which circulates among consumers is quite right; so right that there are bags of money which have passed through a thousand hands in three or four years, and will continue to do so, for just as long, and among just as many hands, without being opened.

I give you what you lack. You give me some security or assurance that another will provide me with what I do not have.

CXXXIX

The grass grows in the meadow, while the crown in my purse stays the same. If I use my crown, will I have used it in buying the grass? The bought grass dies; and the grass continues to grow in the meadow. In the long run the clump of grass, which always goes on growing in the meadow, is worth more than the crown.

But the grass does not grow without labour and expense in the meadow, and the wise man puts his crown to work. Each of them has its expense of cultivation and its net product. The only difference I see is that the grass nourishes and that the crown is not edible. The grass goes in search of the crown; the crown comes in search of the grass. Rain, drought and hail have put almost all these kinds of wealth on a level. It is rare for famine to be general throughout the whole of France. It is even rarer for the Dutch crown not to be looking for profit in every country in Europe.

The crown, buried in the furrow, is being wagered for what are almost certainly large gains. The crown put into commerce has its risks and returns which are more or less considerable. Of all commodities the crown is that which keeps its value longest without loss. The crown at rest produces nothing, nor does the land. The crown can bring in a return all year without expense. The land only brings in a return at a certain time and always needs expense.

In the current state of affairs, an individual can say quite sensibly, 'Give me land or crowns, it is all the same to me.' But what applies to his purse is not the case for a whole country. An agricultural province has the thing, while a region where money is prevalent has only the sign. The first can do without the sign but the second cannot do without the thing. In time, the agricultural province will have the sign and the thing, and the region with money will have nothing. But when the province has both thing and sign, and the region has nothing, what use will the sign be to the former? Virtually none. Half of it could easily be thrown into the sea without the province being any the poorer.

What then do the men who exploit the mines of Peru do? They continually increase the quantity of the sign. Their work is always the same. And the sign which they multiply loses its value to the extent that they multiply it. If they were masters of multiplying it at their discretion they would abolish its use. They would have nothing left,

and they would have reduced exchange to its primitive constraint. Idiots, we have enough gold and silver, or signs. Close your mines and get to work.

CXL

I make a purchase and, for what I have bought, I pay 25 louis. I have no money and instead of 25 louis I give some item of equivalent value. It is the same thing; and my 25 louis and my item are equally a security for the vendor to acquire what he lacks; and it is in this sense, much more extensive than that of article 634, that gold or silver are either raw material or fabricated merchandise.

CXLI

I cannot endure the thought of a sovereign having his own domains.

1. These domains are badly administered; they involve more expense and bring less return.
2. Being exempt from taxation, they are a burden on the people.
3. They are all hired out, and a hireling is a man who takes good care not to improve a fund which does not belong to him, and who never fails to draw as much as he can out of it and ruin it, while it is in his possession.

Why not alienate the domains? The funds would then be applied to the needs of the state. If the state had no debts to pay, it would spend less. These domains would bring in more: they would be continually improved and would provide income for the national revenue according to their value. As for the goods to be enhanced by prerogative of the sovereign, the less extensive they are, the better. A good king has nothing. The richer he is, the poorer are his subjects; and the poorer he is, the richer his subjects. A bad king is someone who has a personal interest separate from that of his people.

CXLII

In this paragraph on the income of the king there is nothing of what I am looking for. The king has no income. But he is head of a numerous family which has needs and the administrator of the funds intended to satisfy those needs. When the funds are exhausted and

the needs satisfied, nothing is left. Among the needs, I include the costs of his household.

The costs of his household will be very modest, if he bears in mind that they are made at another's expense. I know nothing so reasonable as a courtier's reply to his sovereign when the latter observed that the courtier was better dressed than he was. 'That is as it should be,' said the courtier. 'And why is that?' 'Because I pay for my clothes and for yours.'

Tyranny arises from the prejudice that the people is made for the sovereign; extravagance and dissipation are the consequences of the prejudice that he is master of the house, rather than just its steward and bursar.

CXLIII

This is the place to deal with usury.

If a nation had almost no trade with neighbouring countries it would be almost a matter of indifference to it whether it had more or less money. Then the world would be no richer than it was before the discovery of the mines in Peru. There is more money in the great fair, but what happens? In this great fair everything is on sale, the buyers and sellers are from different nations, and among them the security or assurance of exchange is unequally divided. So there are some buyers who can acquire more easily (or with more difficulty), all other things being equal.

What I have just said about the great fair, or common market of all the nations, I could say about an individual fair or market of a single nation. In this market the security of exchange is more or less general, and it is more or less unequally divided. How then is it possible to assign a constant and fixed price to this security of exchange? Above all, if you consider the greater or lesser benefit which each person can derive from his own social standing.

So it is as ridiculous to fix the price of money as to fix the price of cucumbers. Money is a commodity which should be left to itself like the others; it should go up or down in price according to a thousand different factors; and every attempt to control it can only be absurd and harmful.

If there were general competition arising from an unlimited freedom in trading, the interest on money would necessarily be reduced. The ruinous borrowings (which one would wish to prevent)

would be less frequent. The borrower would only have to pay the price of the borrowed money, instead of the current situation in which there is an additional sum which the usurer needs for his conscience, his honour and the danger of an illicit action – a sum which increases as the number of usurers is rarer and the prohibition more rigorously enforced.

The law of interest is unjust, and every unjust law can only be bad, since in reducing competition between vendors it makes the thing which is sinful more expensive.

The law against usurers is suited to make usurers; for them it becomes an exclusive privilege of the trade in money, if they are prepared to risk the infamy. The law against usury accelerates the ruin of the rash; it reduces the number of those to whom they can go and seek help, so usurers have to pay both for the thing and the danger.

Since everything represents money, and there is no law regulating the price of other articles of merchandise (whatever the legislator may or may not permit), usury is practised in a hundred other ways, often much more pernicious. You do not buy money, but rather the velvet out of which to make money. The law against usury is useless, because there is no usurer, however clumsy he may be, who cannot find his way round it.

The price of silver as metal is variable; the price of silver as security and assurance of exchange is also variable, both relative to the vendor and to the buyer.

If it is a matter of indifference to a self-sufficient nation whether or not it has much money, it is not so for a nation which trades with its neighbours.

I do not know if the surfeit of money, which should make labour excessively expensive, is not destructive of its own manufactures; for manufactures are supported by work. Now how is it possible for the manufactures of one country to continue as before if I can obtain the things manufactured by my neighbour at a much lower price (whether the law permits or prohibits the importation)?

For what does prohibition produce? Smuggling, which lasts as long as the danger to the smuggler does not bring the imported merchandise down to the level of the native merchandise. Up to now I have seen little advantage in laws banning trade, even in raw materials. As for the disadvantages, there are two which are obvious: the smuggler

is a man lost to the nation, and the men employed in preventing smuggling are also so many men lost.

CXLIV

[*The total expenditure should, if possible, not exceed the revenue.*] It is just as important to say the opposite: that the total revenue should not exceed the expenditure.

CXLV

I see in Her Imperial Majesty's Instruction a plan for an excellent Code, but not a word on the means of ensuring its stability. I see in it the name of the despot abdicated, but the thing itself preserved, and despotism called monarchy.

I see no provision in it for the emancipation of the body of the nation; but without emancipation, or without liberty, there is no property; without property, no agriculture; without agriculture, no strength, greatness, prosperity, wealth.

But the Empress has a great soul, insight, enlightenment, a very extensive genius; justice, goodness, patience and resolution. And, to use her own words, the tree she cannot topple with one blow she brings down by gradually cutting its roots. She displays magnificence without being wasteful; she is in good health; she is forty-four years old and, she has told me, promises to live to eighty. There is nothing which cannot be completed with time and so rare a collection of excellent qualities.

It is impossible that the places of education, if they last, will not change the face of her empire. People used to go to Sparta to see the way in which the young were brought up; I do not despair of hoping that one day people will make the journey to Russia for the same reason. And may God grant that she finishes swiftly and gloriously her war against the Turks.¹⁷ The death of a hundred Turks does not compensate for the blood of a single Russian; and the laurels won through war will never compensate her empire for the loss of one year of her reign.

¹⁷ War between Russia and Turkey broke out in 1768, which led Catherine to suspend the Commission debating the *Nakaz*. Although the war ended in 1774, and Diderot continued to revise this text after that date, he left this reference unaltered – a characteristic touch, because it gave his remarks a topical immediacy.

Extracts from the
Histoire des Deux Indes

Editorial preface

Among the manuscripts found in the Fonds Vandeul were a number relating to the abbé Raynal's *Histoire des Deux Indes*. Diderot's participation in this work had been rumoured during the 1780s and had been evident to scholars since the late nineteenth century, but only with this discovery did a full appraisal of his contribution become possible. It is now clear that Diderot used Raynal's work to publish a great deal of his own material, and this has transformed our knowledge of his thought in the final years of his life.

Two substantial collections of these writings have been published by Gianluigi Goggi: *Pensées détachées* (Siena, 1976) and *Mélanges et morceaux divers* (Siena, 1977). Selections have appeared in Roger Lewinter's edition of *Œuvres complètes de Diderot* (Paris, 1973) and Yves Benot's volume of extracts from Raynal's *Histoire* (Paris, 1981). A critical edition of Diderot's contributions is being prepared by Goggi for the Hermann edition of the *Œuvres complètes*. In the meanwhile scholars can consult the invaluable analysis provided by Michèle Duchet in *Diderot et l'Histoire des Deux Indes ou l'écriture fragmentaire* (see Further reading), which indicates what seem to be all Diderot's contributions, identified by reference either to material from the Fonds Vandeul or to other texts by him. For complex reasons not all the attributions are certain, and, since we know that Diderot allowed Raynal to alter his text at times, we cannot always be sure that the printed version reflects his exact words. Unless new manuscripts come to light, such uncertainties will remain. But they should not be exaggerated. There are good reasons for supposing that all the passages given here are accurate reflections of Diderot's thought.

His contributions were mostly quite short, from a single paragraph to one or two pages; but there were also extensive passages which in some cases amount to as many as fifty pages. In the selection given here, based in all cases on the third edition of the *Histoire*, reference is provided (after

the editors' subheading) to the book and chapter numbers, and then to the volume (in roman) and page (in arabic) of the 1783 edition, published by Libraires associés (Neuchâtel and Geneva) in nine volumes (plus one supplementary volume); this is the edition used by Duchet for her comprehensive analysis of the work.

Philosophical and Political History of European Trade and Settlements in the Two Indies

I INTRODUCTION

(Book One, Introduction; 1, 2-4)

To the daunting task [of describing the vast changes brought about, within Europe and across the world, by the discovery of the West Indies and the East Indies] I have devoted my life. I have called upon informed men of all nations to help me. I have questioned the living and the dead – the living whose voices we hear around us, the dead who have handed down, in whatever language they have used, what they have thought and known. I have assessed their authority; I have set their testimonies against one another; I have clarified the facts. If I had been told of someone on the North Pole or the Equator who could make some important points clear to me, I would have gone to the Pole or the Equator to ask him to do that. The venerable image of the truth has always been in front of my eyes. O holy Truth! It is you alone I have respected. If in the centuries to come my work still finds some readers, I hope that they will see how detached I have been from any passions and prejudices, and that they will be unaware of the country of my birth, the government under which I lived, the position I occupied or the religion I professed. I hope that they will all consider me their fellow-citizen and friend.

In dealing with subjects that are important for human happiness, your first concern and duty must be to rid your soul of all hope and fear. There, lifted up above all human considerations, you float above the atmosphere and look at the earth beneath you. You shed tears for

persecuted genius, for forgotten talent, for unrewarded virtue. You pour insult and shame on those who deceive and oppress men. You see the arrogant head of the tyrant brought low and covered with mud, while the modest brow of the just man reaches up to the top of the sky. There, I can truly cry out: 'I am free and feel myself equal to my subject.' There, finally, as I see at my feet these beautiful lands where the arts and sciences are flourishing, and which lay for so long under the darkness of barbarism, I have wondered: who is it who dug these canals, drained these plains, founded these towns, brought together, clothed and civilised these people? And the voices of all enlightened men among them have answered: 'It is commerce; it is commerce.'

2 THE DISSOLUTION OF GOVERNMENTS

(Book One, Ch. 28; I, 171-2)

A government is always a very complicated machine. When it is well conceived it has its beginning, its progress and its moment of perfection. When it is from the outset flawed, it has its beginning, its progress and its moment of extreme corruption. In both cases it has to deal with so great a number of concerns, internal and external, that once it comes to its dissolution, either through the ineptitude of the leader or the impatience of the subjects, it can only have the most frightening consequences. If, on account of their impatience, the subjects come to break the yoke under which they are weary of groaning, a nation advances more or less rapidly to anarchy, through waves of blood. If by the indolence or weakness of the sovereign (incapable of holding the reins of the empire), it arrives unawares at this fatal point, blood is not shed; but the nation falls into a state of death. It is no more than a corpse, all the parts of which begin to putrefy, separate, and are transformed into a mass of worms which, once they have devoured everything, themselves decompose. Nevertheless, the surrounding nations close in, as we see voracious animals do in the wild. They easily take possession of a defenceless country. Then the people pass into a state worse than when they emerged from barbarism. The laws of the conqueror struggle with those of the conquered; the habits of one against those of the other; *mœurs* against *mœurs*; religion against religion; the language becomes confused with a foreign idiom. It is a chaos whose end is hard to predict, which only

clears after several centuries, and traces of which are never entirely erased, even by the happiest events.

3 AN ADDRESS TO LOUIS XVI

(Book Four, Ch. 18; II, 165-9)

[Diderot addresses Louis XVI, using the familiar *tu*, on the internal and external condition of France.]

Cast your eyes over the capital of your empire and you will find two classes of citizens. Some, wallowing in wealth, flaunt a luxury which provokes indignation among those not corrupted by it. Others, overwhelmed with need, make their situation worse by the pretence of a prosperity which they do not have. For such is the power of gold, when it has become the god of a nation, that it takes the place of all talent and replaces all virtue; and you must either have wealth or make people believe you have it. Among this collection of dissolute men you will see a few hard-working, upright, thrifty [Protestant] citizens, virtually banned by bad laws, which were the product of intolerance. They are kept away from all public office, and are always ready to emigrate because they are not allowed to put down roots by owning property. They live in a state where they have neither civil honour nor security.

Look at the provinces, where all kinds of industry are dying out. You will see them succumbing to the burden of taxes and to the many cruel vexations of the horde of people who are parasites of the tax-farmer.

Then focus your eyes on the countryside and consider with a dry eye, if you can, the fate of the person who makes our prosperity, condemned to die of poverty: the unfortunate labourer who scarcely has enough straw from the land he cultivated so as to cover his cottage and make himself a bed. See the protected extortioner going round that man's pitiful home in order to find in the signs of some improvement to his sad lot the pretext for increasing the extortions. See the crowds of men who have nothing, leaving their homes at dawn and making their way, with their wives, children and animals, with no income or food, to work on the highways, which benefit only those who possess everything.

I see [the king]. Your sensitive soul is overwhelmed with grief and wearily you ask what remedy there can be for so many evils. You will

be told what that is, and you will repeat it to yourself. But first you should know that the monarch who has only the virtues of peace can be loved by his subjects, but strength alone wins the respect of his neighbours; that kings have no relatives and that faulty pacts last only as long as the contracting parties find them to be in their interest; that there is even less to be gained from an alliance with an artificial house¹ which will demand rigorous observance of treaties made with it and will never lack excuses to evade their terms if these hinder its expansion. You should be aware that a king, the one person in the land who does not know if he has any real friend, has no friend either outside his country and can only rely on himself.

You should know that an empire cannot endure, any more than an individual family, without morals and virtue; that dissipation is the road to ruin and can only be avoided by economy; that extravagance adds nothing to the majesty of the throne; and that one of your ancestors never displayed himself to greater effect than when, accompanied by a few guards (whom he did not need), dressed more simply than any of his subjects, his back resting against an oak tree, he listened to complaints and settled disputes. You will only escape from the abyss left by your predecessors if you resolve to make your conduct conform to that of a rich but debt-ridden individual who is nevertheless honest enough to want to honour the thoughtless commitments of his fathers and just enough to feel indignation at all tyrannical means and therefore reject them.

In the daytime and at night, in the hubbub of your court and in the silence of your study, when you reflect – and when should you not be reflecting about the happiness of twenty-two million men whom you cherish, who love you and are eager to show their adoration? – ask yourself if you intend to continue the senseless spending of your palace; or to retain that mass of officers, high and low, who devour you; or to perpetuate the expense of maintaining so many useless châteaux and the enormous salaries of those who run them; or to double and triple the expenses of your household by making journeys as useless as they are costly; or to squander the livelihood of your people on scandalous parties . . . Do you intend to go on condoning the insatiable greed of your courtiers and the courtiers of those close

¹This is a reference to the Treaty of Paris (1763), which ended the Seven Years War between France and Britain, but did not allay French fears about British colonial expansion.

to you; or to allow the nobility and magistrates, all the powerful or protected men of your kingdom, to continue to keep far from them the burden of taxation and make it fall on the people – a kind of extortion against which the groans of the oppressed and the objections of the enlightened have for so long protested in vain; or to grant a body [the Church], which owns a quarter of the wealth of the kingdom, the absurd privilege of taxing itself, at its discretion, and which, by shamelessly applying the word *gratuit* to its contributions, means to show you that it owes nothing, that it still has a right to your protection and all the advantages of society, without having to pay for any of the costs, and that you have no right to its gratitude?

When you have replied to these questions with the truth and justice which your sensitive royal soul will inspire, act accordingly. Be resolute. Do not let yourself be shaken by any of those representations which duplicity and self-interest will conjure up in order to stop you, perhaps even to frighten you; and rest assured that you will soon be the most honoured and formidable ruler on earth.

Yes, Louis XVI, such is the fate which awaits you. Confident of your success, I have good reason to go on living. There is only one more word, but an important word, for me to say to you. You must recognise that the most dangerous impostor, the cruellest enemy of our happiness and your glory, is the impudent flatterer who will not hesitate to lull you to sleep in a fatal calm, either by making the dreadful picture of your situation look less grim, or by exaggerating the unsuitable, dangerous or difficult character of the solutions which will occur to you.

You will hear people murmur around you: 'That cannot be; and if it could, it would mean innovations.' Innovations! Yes, indeed. But how many discoveries have there been in the sciences and the arts which have not been innovations? Is the art of governing the only one that cannot be improved? The assembly of the estates of a great nation; the restoration of original freedom; the respectable exercise of the first acts of natural justice; would these then be innovations?

4 TRUTHS OF HISTORY (Book Five, Ch. 34; III, 108)

There is no nation which in becoming civilised does not lose its virtue, courage and love of independence. There is nothing unusual

in the fact that the southern peoples of Asia, being the first to be assembled into societies, were the first to be exposed to despotism. Since the origin of the world this has been the way all associations have gone. Another truth equally proved by history is that all arbitrary power rushes towards its own destruction, and that everywhere revolutions – quicker or slower, sooner or later – bring back the reign of liberty.

5 CIVIL WARS

(Book Seven, Ch. 7; III, 321-2)

Civil wars derive their character from the causes which produce them. When the horrors of tyranny and the instinct of liberty put weapons into the hands of bold men, and they are victorious, then the calm which follows this temporary calamity is a time of the greatest happiness. Every person has acquired an energy which he transmits to the general *mœurs*. Among the few citizens who witnessed and brought about this fortunate upheaval there is more moral strength than in the most populous nations. The ablest man has become the most powerful, and everyone is amazed to find himself in the position intended for him by nature.

But when the dissensions have an impure source, when slaves fight among themselves to choose a tyrant, or ambitious men fight to oppress, or criminals to share out spoils, the peace which ends such horrors is scarcely preferable to the war that gave birth to them. Criminals take the place of the judges who had condemned them, and become the oracle of the laws which they had violated. You see men, debauched by their extravagance and disorder, insulting the virtuous citizens whose inheritance they have insolently and arrogantly invaded. In this chaos only the passions are heard. Greed seeks to grow rich without working, revenge to do its work without fear, licence to set aside all restraint, restlessness to turn everything upside down. The intoxication of slaughter leads to that of debauchery. The sacred bed of innocence or marriage is stained with blood, adultery and rape. The brutal frenzy of the multitude delights in destroying everything they cannot enjoy. So, in a few hours, the monuments of several centuries perish.

If inertia, complete exhaustion, or some fortunate accidents delay these disasters, the habits of crime, murder and disrespect for the law,

which inevitably survive after so much upheaval, act as a yeast always ready to ferment. The generals with no command, the dissolute soldiers without pay, the people greedy for novelties in the hope of a better future, such elements and instruments of trouble are always at hand for the first man of sedition who knows how to put them to work.

6 PRINCIPLES OF COLONISATION

(Book Eight, Ch. 1; IV, 105-8)

Both reason and equity permit the establishment of colonies, but they also mark out the principles from which one must not stray when founding them.

Whoever they may be, a number of men coming to a foreign and unknown land should be considered as a single person. Numbers increase strength but right remains the same. If one hundred or two hundred men can say, 'This country belongs to us', then a single person can also say that.

Either the country is deserted, or it is partly deserted and partly inhabited, or it is fully inhabited.

If it is fully inhabited I can lay legitimate claim only to the hospitality and assistance which one man owes another. If I am left to die of hunger or cold on a seashore, I will draw my weapon and seize by force what I need, and kill anyone who opposes me. But if I am granted sanctuary, fire, water, bread and salt, then all obligations towards me will have been fulfilled. If I demand more, I become a thief and a murderer. Let us suppose that I have been accepted. I have become acquainted with the country's laws and *mœurs*. They suit me. I want to settle there. If I am allowed to do so, it is a favour done to me, and a refusal cannot offend me. The Chinese may be bad politicians when they shut us out of their empire, but they are not unjust. Their country has sufficient population, and we are too dangerous as guests.

If the country is partly deserted and partly occupied, then the deserted part is mine. Through my labour I can take possession of it. The existing inhabitant would be a barbarian if he suddenly came and tore down my hut, destroyed my plantations and plundered my fields. I could resist his incursion by force. I can extend my domain up to the borders of his land. The forests, rivers and sea-shore are common to us both, unless their exclusive use was necessary to his livelihood.

The only other thing he can demand of me is that I should be a peaceful neighbour and that my settlement should in no way threaten him. Every people is justified in providing for its present and future safety. If I set up a stockade, amass weapons, and put up fortifications, a people's deputies would be wise if they came and said to me: 'Are you our friend? Are you our enemy? If a friend, what is the purpose of all these preparations for war? If an enemy, you will understand why we destroy them.' And the nation will be sensible if it immediately gets rid of a well-founded fear.

With even better reason, and with no offence against the laws of humanity and justice, that people could expel and kill me if I seized women, children and property; if I infringed its civil liberty; if I restricted its religious opinions; if I claimed to give it laws; if I wished to make it my slave. Then I would be only one more wild animal in its vicinity, and no more pity would be due to me than to a tiger. If I had commodities it lacked and it had some which would be useful to me, I can suggest exchanges. We are both free to put whatever price suits us on things we own. A needle has more real value for a people who must use a fishbone to sew up the animal skins they wear than their money would have for me. A sword or an axe will be of infinite value for the person who uses sharp stones, set in a piece of wood hardened by fire, to act as such tools. Besides, I have crossed the seas to bring these useful objects, and I will cross them again to bring back to my own country the things I will have taken in exchange. The expenses of the journey, of damage and dangers, should be part of the calculation. If I laugh inwardly at the stupidity of the person who gives me gold for iron, the person I regard as stupid will also laugh at me for giving iron (the use of which he knows) for gold (which is useless to him). We are both deceived, or, rather, we are neither of us deceived. The exchanges should be perfectly free. If I want to seize by force what is refused me, or to use violence to have something which is not wanted forcibly accepted, then I could legitimately be either put in chains or driven away. If I get hold of the foreign commodity without offering the price for it, or I take it away by stealth, I am a thief who can be killed without any remorse.

An uninhabited and deserted country is the only one which can be appropriated. The first well-attested discovery was a capture of legitimate possession.

Let the European nations make their own judgement and give

themselves the name they deserve, according to these principles, which seem to me true for all time. Their explorers arrive in a region of the New World unoccupied by anyone from the Old World, and immediately bury a small strip of metal on which they have engraved these words: *This country belongs to us*. And why does it belong to you? Are you as unjust and stupid as some primitive men who are accidentally carried to your shores, where they write on the sand or on the bark of your trees: *This country is ours*? You have no right to the natural products of the country where you land, and you claim a right over your fellow-men. Instead of recognising this man as a brother, you only see him as a slave, a beast of burden. Oh my fellow citizens! You think like that and you behave like that; and you have ideas of justice, a morality, a holy religion and a mother in common with those whom you treat so tyrannically.² This reproach should especially be addressed to the Spaniards.

7 NATIONAL CHARACTER AT HOME AND OVERSEAS

(Book Nine, Ch. I; IV, 233-5)

National character is the result of a large number of causes, some constant and some variable. This part of the history of a people is perhaps the most interesting and least difficult to follow. The constant causes are determined by the part of the earth which they inhabit. The variable causes are recorded in their annals, and are evident from their effects. While these causes act in contradiction to one another, the nation is unconscious [of itself as a nation]. It only begins to have a character suitable to it at the moment when its speculative principles accord with its physical situation. It is then that it makes great strides towards the splendour, wealth and happiness which it can expect from the free use of its local resources.

But this character, which should preside over a people's ruling body (and does not always do so), almost never determines the actions of individuals. They have interests which control them, and passions which trouble or blind them. And there is hardly one among them who would not build his own prosperity through public ruin. The capitals of empires are the homes of the national character, that is to

² This passage draws on the *Supplément* (see p. 42).

say, the places in which it is displayed with most energy in words and disregarded most completely in deeds. I only make an exception for some rare occasions when it is a question of general safety. The greater the distance from the capital the looser the mask becomes. At the frontier it falls off. Going from one hemisphere to another, what does it become? Nothing.

Beyond the Equator a man is neither English, Dutch, French, Spanish, nor Portuguese. He retains only those principles and prejudices of his native country which justify or excuse his conduct. He crawls when he is weak; he is violent when strong; he is in a hurry to acquire, in a hurry to enjoy, and capable of every crime which will lead him most quickly to his goals. He is a domestic tiger returning to the forest; the thirst for blood takes hold of him once more. This is how all the Europeans, every one of them, indistinctly, have appeared in the countries of the New World. There they have assumed a common frenzy – the thirst for gold.

Would it not have been more useful and humane, and less costly, to have taken to these distant regions a few hundred young men and women? The men would have married the women of the country, and the women the native men. Ties of blood, the strongest and most immediate of bonds, would soon have formed a single family out of the natives and the foreigners.

In this intimate relationship the primitive inhabitant would not have been slow to realise that the arts and knowledge which had been brought to him were very favourable to improve his condition. He would have had the greatest esteem for the modest and moderate teachers whom the seas had brought him, and he would have listened to them openly.

This happy confidence would produce a peace which would have been impossible if the newcomers had arrived with the imperious, commanding tone of masters and conquerors. Between men who have reciprocal needs, commerce grows up without difficulty. Soon the inhabitants would regard as friends and brothers those whom interest or other motives had led to their country. The Indians would have adopted a European religion, because wherever a government does not interfere, and the intolerance and madness of priests does not make religion an instrument of discord, there a religion becomes common to all the citizens of an empire. Similarly, civilisation follows from the inclination which leads every man to improve his situation, provided

that its advantages are not presented by untrustworthy foreigners, and that no force is used to push anyone in that direction.

8 THE INFLUENCE OF SOCIETY AND SITUATION

(Book Nine, Ch. 20; v, 5-6)

[Diderot compares the behaviour of two European settlements in South America, in the province of St Paul in Brazil and on the island of Sainte-Catherine, near Rio de Janeiro.]

The scraps and dregs of civilised societies can sometimes form a well-ordered society. It is the iniquity of our laws, the unjust distribution of goods, the burdens and pains of poverty, the insolence and impunity of the rich, the abuse of power, which frequently make rebels and criminals. Bring together these unfortunate men, whom an often exaggerated severity has banished from their own homes; give them a bold, generous, humane and enlightened leader; and you will make out of these ruffians an honest, docile, reasonable people. If necessity drives them to be warlike, they will become conquerors; while they faithfully observe their own laws, they will violate the rights of other nations in order to increase their power. That is what the Romans did. If they lack an able leader and are left to the mercy of chance and circumstances, they will be wicked, restless, greedy, unstable, always at odds with one another or with their neighbours. That is what the Paulists were. Finally, if they can live more comfortably from the natural fruits of the earth, or from cultivation and commerce, than from plunder, they will take on the virtues of their situation, the gentle inclinations which the rational self-interest of well-being inspires. Civilised by the happiness and security of a peaceful life, they will respect in all men the rights which they enjoy themselves, and will exchange their surplus produce with the commodities of other people. That is what the refugees of Sainte-Catherine were.

9 THE RIGHT OF PROPERTY

(Book Nine, Ch. 28; v, 37-8)

[I would like to say a few words about] the sacred and imprescriptible right of property. In a monastery everything belongs to everyone. No

one possesses anything individually; the goods form a common property. It is a single animal with twenty, thirty, forty, one thousand, ten thousand heads. A society is not like that. There, each person has his head or his property, which forms one part of the general wealth. He is absolute master over it; he can use it, or even abuse it, at his own discretion. An individual should be allowed to leave his land uncultivated, if that suits him, without government interference. If the government sets itself up as judge of the abuse, then it will not hesitate to set itself up as judge of the use; and all true notions of property and liberty will be destroyed. If it can demand that I make use of my possession as it chooses; if it metes out punishment when that is contravened, or when there is neglect or stupidity (and all under the pretext of public or general utility), then I am no longer absolute master of my possession. I am only its administrator at someone else's pleasure.

In this matter man in society must be left alone to be a bad citizen; because it will not be long before he will be severely punished by poverty, and by a contempt more cruel than poverty. The person who burns his commodities, or throws his money out of the window, is a kind of idiot who is too uncommon to require prohibitive laws to restrain him. And such laws would be too detrimental, by infringing the sacred and universal notion of property. In every well-ordered constitution, the concerns of the magistrate should be limited to what affects general security, internal tranquillity, the behaviour of the military, and the observation of the laws. Wherever you see authority go further, be bold and say out loud that the people are being exposed to depredation. Cast your eye over the centuries and nations, and you will see this great and beautiful idea of public utility as the symbolic image of a Hercules who knocks senseless one part of the people, to the shouts of joy and acclamation of the other, while the latter are all the time aware that their turn will come to be crushed by the same club.

IO PIRATES

(Book Ten, Ch. 10; v, 111-13)

It is not easy to discern the reason for the activity of these extraordinary and romantic men. It cannot be a matter of need: in the lands they crossed they were offered immense wealth, collected before their very eyes by people less able than they were. Was it greed? They

would not have spent in a single day the booty of a voyage. As they had no homeland they were not concerned with its defence, or expansion, or revenge. A love of glory, if they had known it, would have kept them from that mass of atrocities and crimes which have diminished the renown of their greatest exploits. A love of rest would never have spurred them on to continual activity and indescribable dangers.

What then were the moral causes which gave the pirates so extraordinary an existence? That land – where Nature seemed to have condemned all the turbulent passions to perpetual silence, where men need drunkenness and wild parties to arouse them from a habitual lethargy, where they lived content with inactivity and boredom – suddenly found itself inhabited by an impetuous and fiery horde which seemed to breathe in, with the air of a burning atmosphere, the excess of all feelings and the frenzy of all passions. While a blazing sky enervated the former conquerors of the New World; while the Spaniards, then so agitated at home, shared with the defeated Americans the habits of indolence and despondence, men coming out of the most temperate climates of Europe went to the Equator and displayed kinds of energy that Nature had never seen before.

If you want to discover the sources of this revolution, you will see that the pirates had lived under the confines of European governments. The mainspring of liberty, stifled in souls for centuries, had [when released] an incredible activity and produced the most terrible moral phenomena ever seen. At the first word of the success of these adventurers, restless and enthusiastic men of all nations went to join them. The attraction of novelty; the idea of and desire for remote things; the need for a change; the hope of a better fortune; the instinct which leads the imagination to great schemes; the admiration which produces quick imitation; the need to overcome obstacles caused by rashness; the encouragement of example; the equality of good and evil among free companions; in a word, that fleeting fermentation which earth, sky, sea and fortune excited in men covered alternately in gold and in rags, steeped in blood and in pleasure, all these made the pirates something unique in history. But something ephemeral which only shone for an instant.

Nevertheless, people generally look on these brigands with a kind of disgust. That is fair enough, because the loyalty, honesty, disinterestedness and generosity which they practised amongst themselves did not prevent them from committing outrages to humanity every

day. But how can one not admire, in the midst of such crimes, a mass of heroic deeds which would have done honour to the most virtuous people?

II FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

(Book Ten, Ch. 13; v, 120-2)

Wherever the sovereign does not allow people to express themselves freely on economic and political subjects, he provides the most convincing evidence of his inclination to tyranny, of the vicious character of his regime. It is as if he had said to the people: 'I know as well as you that what I have decided is opposed to your freedom, your prerogatives, your interests, your peace and your happiness. But I am not content that you should grumble about that. I will never allow you to become enlightened, because it suits me that you should be so dull as not to perceive my whims, my arrogance, my stupid dissipations, my extravagance, the depredations of my courtiers and favourites, my ruinous amusements, my still more ruinous passions, or the public utility which (in so far as it is up to me or those who succeed me) never was, is, or will be anything other than a simple pretext. Everything which I do is well done. Believe it, or not; but keep your mouths shut. I want you to experience, in all the most senseless and terrible ways, the fact that I reign for my own sake, and neither through you nor for you. And if any of you has the temerity to contradict me, let him die in the obscurity of a dungeon, or may a noose deprive him forever of the capacity to commit a second indiscretion. For such is my good pleasure.'

As a result, here is the man of genius stifled or reduced to silence, and a nation held back in the barbarity of its religion, laws, *mœurs* and government. It is kept in ignorance of those things that matter most to its true interests – its power, commerce, splendour and happiness – in the midst of other nations who grow enlightened around it through the free efforts and the help of good minds addressing the only subjects truly worthy of them. But the logic of a prohibitive administration works against itself everywhere. The progress of enlightenment is not stopped; to slow it down is only counter-productive. Prevention only stimulates; it gives men a sense of rebellion and their writings the character of mockery. It grants too much honour to innocent subjects when there are two hundred thousand

assassins under your command, and you are afraid of a few written pages.

In England every day you see a mass of books appear in which everything which affects the nation is freely discussed. Among these writings some are well founded, composed by good minds, by informed and zealous citizens. Their opinion serves to enlighten the public about its interests and to direct the government in its operations. In this state there are few rules useful for the internal economy which have not been suggested, prepared or improved by one of these writings. Unhappy are the people who are deprived of this advantage!

'But', it will be said, 'for each wise man who spreads enlightenment there are innumerable writers who, either through discontent with those in office, or to pander to the taste of the nation, or for personal reasons, take pleasure in stirring up their readers. The method they normally use is to advance claims for their country beyond just limits, to present as manifest usurpations the slightest steps which other powers take to protect their possessions. These exaggerations, filled with bias and falsehood, spread opinions and cause prejudices which usually result in a nation being kept in a constant state of war with its neighbours. Even if the government would want to keep a true balance between its subjects and foreigners, and not be led by popular errors, it nevertheless finds itself forced to follow them.'

Undoubtedly, freedom of the press produces these drawbacks. But they are so trivial and short-lived, in comparison with the advantages, that I shall not bother to dwell on them. The question comes down to these two words: 'Is it better for a people to be eternally deadened than sometimes troublesome?' Sovereigns, do you wish to be wicked? Permit writing. Perverse men will appear who will serve you according to your bad genius and perfect you in the arts of a Tiberius. Do you wish to be good? Allow more writing. Upright men will appear who will perfect you in the arts of a Trajan. How many things you still have to learn, in order to be great, whether in good or evil!

12 THE FOUNDING AND REGENERATION OF NATIONS

(Book Eleven, Ch. 4; v, 169-70)

The great men who can form and mature a newly born nation, cannot regenerate one that is old and decrepit. There are many reasons for

this, all equally clear. The founder speaks to a new man who is conscious of his misfortune and who, seeing that continually, is disposed to be docile. He has only to show the face and character of someone who does good in order to be heard, obeyed and cherished. Daily experience builds confidence in his person and in the force of his advice. Soon people are compelled to recognise in him a great superiority in enlightenment. He preaches virtue, which is the more compelling the simpler the disciple. It is not hard for him to denounce the vices of which the vicious person is the first victim. He attacks directly the prejudices which he means to overturn. With the others, he uses the hand of time to cut off their roots. Their ignorance, which cannot unravel the goal of his plans, assures him of their success. His political sense suggests to him a thousand ways of surprising, and he soon comes to be venerated. Then he commands and his orders are supported, according to circumstance, by the authority of heaven. During his life he is high priest and legislator. After his death altars are built to him, his name is invoked, he is a god.

The situation of someone restoring a corrupted nation is very different. He is an architect who sets out to build on a patch of land which is covered with ruins. He is a doctor who tries to cure a gangrenous corpse. He is a sage preaching reform to the hardened. The present generation only hate him and persecute him. He will not see the generation to come. In his life he will produce little fruit with much trouble, and after his death he will be the cause of fruitless regret. A nation is only regenerated in a bath of blood. It is the image of old Aeson, whose youth was only brought back by Medea when she cut him up and put him on the boil. Once a nation has declined one man cannot revive it. That seems to be achieved by a long sequence of revolutions. The man of genius passes too quickly and leaves no posterity.

13 THE STATE OF LEARNING (Book Eleven, Ch. 10; v, 200-1)

In all centuries and in every nation we have seen different kinds of learning rise, fall and follow one another in a certain regular order. This is not the result of one person being erratic or becoming exhausted. It is a defect of the most populous and enlightened

societies. It seems that the arts and sciences have a time when they are fashionable.

We began by having scholars. After the scholars came poets and orators. After the poets and orators, metaphysicians, who gave way to geometricians, followed by physicists, and then by chemists and naturalists. Now the taste for natural history is on the decline. We are all wrapped up in matters of government, legislation, morality, politics and commerce. If I were allowed to make a prediction, I would declare that people will more and more apply their minds to history, a vast field in which philosophy has not yet set foot.

What would be left of the enormous number of works of history, if you tore out the pages devoted to the great assassins called conquerors, or reduced the number to that small amount of pages which even then they scarcely merit? Who has told us about climate, soil, agriculture, animals, birds, fish, plants, fruit, minerals, *mœurs*, customs, superstitions, prejudices, sciences, arts, commerce, government and laws? What do we know about the ancient nations which can be of some use to modern nations? Are not both their wisdom and their stupidity equally lost to us? Their annals never instruct us about the subjects about which we most need to know — the true glory of a sovereign, the foundations of nations' strength, the happiness of people, the duration of empires. I agree that those beautiful speeches made by generals to their soldiers on the point of action may serve as models of rhetorical eloquence. But when I know them by heart I will not as a result become any fairer, more resolute, more informed, or better. The moment draws near when reason, justice and truth will snatch from the hands of ignorance and flattery the pen which they have held for too long. Tremble! you who feed men with lies, or make them groan beneath oppression. You are going to be judged.

14 SLAVERY AND LIBERTY

(Book Eleven, Ch. 24; v, 275-8)

[Diderot describes the gradual end of feudal serfdom in Europe.]
However it occurred, the revolution was so complete that freedom became more widespread, through the greatest part of Europe, than it had been in any other country or climate. Under all the ancients' governments, even in those now put forward to us as exemplary, most

men were condemned to a cruel and shameful slavery. The more those societies became enlightened, wealthy and powerful, the more the number of slaves increased, and the more wretched became their fate. Athens had twenty slaves for each citizen. The disproportion was even greater in Rome when it became mistress of the universe. In both republics slavery led to the worst excesses of exhaustion, poverty and shame. Since it has been abolished among us the people are a hundred times happier, even in the most despotic empires, than they were formerly in the best-ordered democracies.

But hardly had domestic liberty been reborn in Europe than it was buried in America. The Spaniard, the first to be thrown up by the waves onto the shores of the New World, thought he had no duty to people who did not share his colour, customs or religion. He saw in them only tools for his greed, and he clapped them in irons. These weak men, not used to work, soon died in the foul air of the mines, or in other occupations which were virtually as lethal. Then people called for slaves from Africa. Their number has gone up as more land has been cultivated. The Portuguese, Dutch, English, French, Danes, all the nations, free or subjected, have without remorse sought to increase their fortune in the sweat, blood and despair of these unfortunates. What a horrible system!

Liberty is having ownership of yourself. We can distinguish three kinds of liberty. Natural liberty, civil liberty and political liberty, that is to say, the liberty of the man, of the citizen and of the people. Natural liberty is the right which nature has given every man to dispose of himself as he wishes. Civil liberty is the right that society should guarantee each citizen to be able to do everything which is not contrary to the laws. Political liberty is the situation of a people who have not alienated their sovereignty, and who either make their own laws or are associated to some degree in their legislation.

The first of these liberties is, after the faculty of reason, man's distinctive characteristic. We tie up and subject the animal because it has no notion of right and wrong, high and low. But in my liberty resides the principle of my vices and virtues. It is only the free man who can say 'I wish' or 'I do not wish' and who consequently can be worthy of praise or blame.

Without liberty, or the property of your body and the enjoyment of your mind, you cannot be a husband, father, relative or friend. You

have no *patrie*, fellow citizen, nor God. The slave in the hand of the wicked, an instrument of his wickedness, is lower than the dog which the Spaniard let loose against the American; for the man still has the conscience which the dog lacks. The person who, like a coward, abdicates his liberty, gives himself up to remorse and the greatest misery that a thinking and feeling creature can experience. If there is no power under heaven which can alter my physical organisation and make me into an animal, there is none which can dispose of my freedom. God is my father and not my master. I am his child and not his slave. How then could I grant to the political power that which I refuse to the divine Almighty?

Will these eternal and unchangeable truths, the foundation of all morality, the bedrock of all reasonable government, be contested? Yes! And it will be a barbarous, sordid greed which will commit this insolent act of homicide. See that shipowner bending over his desk and deciding, pen in hand, how many murders he can commit on the coast of Guinea; considering at his leisure how many guns he needs in order to obtain one negro, how many chains to keep him tied up in his ship, how many whips to make him work; calculating in cold blood the value to him of each drop of blood with which this slave will irrigate his plantation; discussing whether the negress will give more or less to the land by the labour of her feeble hands than by the dangers of childbearing. You shudder . . . Ah! if there existed a religion which tolerated or authorised, even by its silence, similar horrors; if, concerned with idle or seditious questions, it did not ceaselessly proclaim against the authors or instruments of this tyranny; if it made it a crime for a slave to break his chains; if it gave shelter to the iniquitous judge who condemns the fugitive to death; if such a religion existed, should its ministers not be stifled under the ruins of their altars?

Men or demons, whoever you are, do you dare to justify the attacks on my independence by the law of the strongest? What! The person who wants to make me a slave is not guilty, but is making use of his rights? Where are these rights? Who has given them such a sacred character that they can silence my rights? By nature I have the right to defend myself; by nature you do not have the right to attack me. If you think that because you are stronger and more clever than me you have authority to oppress me, do not complain if my swift arm tears open your chest to find your heart. Do not complain when you feel, in your

cut-up intestines, the taste of death, which I have stirred in with your food. I am stronger or more clever than you; it is your turn to be victim. Now expiate the crime of having been an oppressor.

15 POLITICAL CRISIS

(Book Thirteen, Ch. 37; VI, 219-20)

In an animal and in a state many illnesses are only a kind of cure which dissipates the vicious humours and restores a new vigour to a robust temperament. The upsets which are fatal to both are those which, being slow, keep them in a habitual malaise and lead them, unawares, to the grave. But after a lively upset has caused a violent crisis, the delirium ceases, the weakness passes, and with the recovery of strength comes a uniform and regular movement which promises the machine a long life. In this way war seems to reinforce and sustain the national character of several European nations, which could have been enervated and corrupted by the prosperity of commerce and the pleasures of luxury. The immense losses occasioned, in almost equal measure, by both victory and defeat make room for industry and reanimate work. Provided the government wishes to help them in the way they want to go, rather than direct the way they must go, then nations flourish once more. This applies above all to France, which only needs an open space for the activity of its inhabitants for it to prosper. Wherever Nature allows the French free scope, they succeed in giving her full range.

16 THE EXAMPLE OF ENGLAND

(Book Fourteen, Introduction; VII, 1-2)

England is, in modern history, the country of great political phenomena. There we have seen freedom in the most violent struggle with despotism, sometimes trampled underfoot and sometimes crushing it in turn. There it ended by triumphing, and everything, even the fanaticism of religion, contributed to its triumph. There one king, brought legally to the scaffold, and another deposed with all his line by national decree, have given a great lesson to the world. There, in the midst of civil convulsions and in the intervals of momentary calm, we have seen the exact and most profound sciences carried to their furthest extent; we have seen minds grow used to reason, reflect and,

above all, concern themselves with government. There, finally, after long and violent upheavals, was formed that Constitution which, if not perfect or free of faults, is at least the most well-suited to the condition of the country, the most favourable to its commerce, the most appropriate to the development of genius, eloquence and all the faculties of the human mind; perhaps the only one, since man lived in society, in which the laws have ensured him his dignity, personal liberty and freedom of thought; where the laws have made him, in a word, a citizen, that is to say, an integral and constituent part of the state and the nation.

17 DESPOTISM AND LIBERTY IN ENGLAND

(Book Fourteen, Ch. 2; VII, 6-9)

[In the sixteenth century] on the continent, where the pretext of discipline had given rise to mercenary armies, most princes acquired unlimited authority, oppressing their population by force or intrigue. In England, the love of freedom, which is so natural to the man who is conscious and thinks, was aroused in the population by the [Protestant] innovators in religion, and reawakened among the educated by their acquaintance with those great writers of antiquity who saw in democracy the most sublime achievement of reason and feeling. This love of freedom sparked off in generous hearts the excessive hatred of unlimited authority. The ascendancy which, as a result of forty years of prosperity, Elizabeth had been able to win and sustain, held back this restlessness, or else turned it towards undertakings which were useful to the state. But as soon as the nation saw a foreign line on the throne, and the sceptre in the hands of a monarch who gave little cause for fear, despite his violent pretensions, then the nation reclaimed its rights and conceived the ambition of governing itself.

Lively disputes broke out between the Court and Parliament. The two powers seemed, by constant confrontation, to be testing their strength. The prince presumed that he was owed a purely passive obedience and that the national assemblies were only the ornament, and not the foundation, of the Constitution. The citizens protested vehemently against these principles which, once they are discussed, are always feeble. They maintained that the people were the essence of government as much as, and more than, the monarch. The one was the matter, the other the form. Now matter can and should change

form, for its own preservation. The supreme law is the safety of the people, not that of the prince. The king can die, the monarchy perish, and the society persist without monarch or throne. Thus did the English argue, once the voice of freedom was heard. There was prevarication, opposition, threats. James ended his career in the midst of these debates, leaving his son to discuss his rights, with the intention of extending them.

The experience of all ages has shown that the tranquillity which is the product of absolute power chills the mind, reduces courage, constricts genius, and throws a whole nation into universal lethargy. But let us expose the successive degrees of this misery, so that people may be aware of the profound inertia in which they are sunk, or by which they are threatened.

At the moment when, at the centre of a nation, the great spectre is erected which no one sees without trembling, the subjects divide into two groups. Some, out of fear, distance themselves. Others, through ambition, go towards it; aware of their servility, they look for security. Between the tyrant and the rest of the nation they form an order of lower tyrants, no less cruel or less easily offended than their master. On their lips are only these words: 'The king; the king has said it, the king wants it; it is the king's intention.' These words are always heard in amazement and end up by being taken as sovereign orders. If there still exists any energy, it is in the military, which has a full sense of its importance and only becomes more overbearing as a result. And the priest, what role does he play? If he is in the king's favour, his example and his utterances serve to deaden the population. If not in favour, he takes offence, becomes troublesome and looks for some fanatic who can be sacrificed. Wherever there are neither fixed laws, nor justice, nor constant forms, nor real property, the magistrate amounts to little or nothing. He waits for a sign to be what is wanted of him. The great lord grovels before the prince, and the people grovel before the great lord. The natural dignity of man is eclipsed. He has not the least idea of his rights.

Around the despot, his henchmen and his favourites, the subjects are crushed underfoot, with the same disregard that we crush the insects who swarm in the dust of the countryside. Morality is corrupted. A moment arrives when the most glaring vexations, the most unprecedented attacks, have lost their character as atrocities and cease to cause revulsion. The person who speaks the names of virtue,

patriotism, equity would only be an 'extremist', an expression which always reveals an abject indulgence for disorders which are profitable. The bulk of the nation becomes dissolute and superstitious. For despotism can neither be established without the help of superstition, nor sustained without its support; and servitude leads to debauchery, which consoles and is never repressed. Educated men, if any are left, have opinions, pay court to the great, and profess whatever religion is expedient. Since spying and informing accompany tyranny, there are spies and informers everywhere, even among the highest. As the least indiscretion bears the taint of the crime of *lèse-majesté*, enemies are very dangerous and friends become suspect. People think little, keep silent and are afraid to argue. They are frightened of their own ideas. The philosopher hides his thought as the rich man hides his wealth. The wisest life is the least conspicuous. Mistrust and terror form the basis of general behaviour. The citizens keep themselves to themselves and the whole nation becomes gloomy, cowardly, stupid and dumb. These are the chains, the fatal symptoms, or the scale of misery on which each people will know its own place.

If you go back over the phenomena which led to this situation and imagine them being just the opposite, they will indicate the movement of legislation which tends to liberty. It is difficult, rapid and violent. It is a fever, more or less severe, but always convulsive. Everything announces sedition and murders. Everything seems to threaten a general dissolution, and if the people are not fated for the final misfortune, it is in blood that happiness is reborn.

England experienced this in the first years of the administration of Charles I.

18 THE CHARACTER OF PRIMITIVE MAN

(Book Fifteen, Ch. 4; VII, 161-3)

A thought comes to mind. If you consider the hatred which one tribe of primitive men bears against another, their hard life on the edge of subsistence, the persistence of their wars, the small size of their population, the innumerable traps which we continually set them, then you cannot help imagining that before three centuries have passed they will have disappeared from the earth. What will our descendants think then of that species of men who will no longer exist, except in the histories of travellers? Will the era of primitive

men not appear to them as the fabulous times of antiquity seem to us? Will they not speak of it as we speak of centaurs and Lapiths?³ How many contradictions will be found in primitive *mœurs* and practices? Will those of our writings which have escaped the neglect of the centuries not seem like novels, like those Plato has left us about ancient Atlantis? How many philosophical disputes will arise about the fine works of our century?

Just as today we tend, in spite of the instability of which we are the witness and plaything, to think that the current state of any species of creature (especially if it exists universally and beyond living memory) must be its necessary and primordial condition, at that future date there will be systematic minds who will prove by an infinite number of reasons – based on the dignity of the human species, its high destiny, its nobility when alive, the marvellous state awaiting it after death, and the wisdom of providence which seems to have only fine prospects in view for mankind – that man was never naked, homeless, without order or laws, reduced in the last resort to an animal condition. In so far as this opinion will agree or conflict with prevailing theological opinions it will be either orthodox or heretical. One day, for having dared to assert that man once was as he now is in Canada (according to the evidence even of our missionaries), a man will be branded a heretic, impious, *philosophe*, and will be hated, persecuted, punished, put in irons, and even burnt. Just so – men of faith, men of law, fanatics or politicians, men who are deceitful or cruel by character or by profession – just so do you lie to yourselves, against Nature which accuses you, against the earth which refutes you, even against God whom you invoke as witness to your deceptions, as guarantee for your injustices. Prophets to come, tyrants of our descendants, may these lines, which truth inspires in the writer who speaks to you in advance, survive long enough to refute you!

Without doubt it is important for future generations that they do not lose the accounts of the life and behaviour of primitive men. It is to this knowledge, perhaps, that we owe all the progress which moral philosophy has made among us. Up to now moralists have looked for the origin and foundations of society in the societies which they had before their eyes. People attributed crimes to man, in order to give him gods who atoned for them; they plunged him into blindness in

³ In Greek mythology, the Lapiths were wild human inhabitants of Thessaly who were famous for their contests with centaurs.

order to become his guides and master, and they called mysterious, supernatural and heavenly that which is only the product of time, ignorance, weakness and deceit. But since it has been perceived that social institutions did not derive either from the needs of nature or from the dogmas of religion – because countless numbers of people lived in a state of independence and with no religion – the vices of morality and legislation have been seen to arise with the establishment of societies. We have become aware that these original evils came from founders and legislators who, for the most part, had created social order for their own use, or whose wise ideas of justice and the public good had been perverted by the ambition of their successors and by the changes brought by time and custom. This discovery has already brought much enlightenment but it is as yet no more than the dawn of a beautiful day for humanity. It is too opposed to established prejudices to have brought about great benefits so soon, but it will no doubt make such benefits the delight of future generations. That happy prospect should be a consolation for the present generation.

19 THE CHARACTER OF CIVILISED MAN

(Book Seventeen, Ch. 4; VIII, 21–7)

Although their origin and antiquity are both very uncertain, it is a matter of great interest to establish or enquire whether those nations which are still half primitive are more or less happy than our civilised people; if the condition of raw man, subject to pure animal instinct (for whom one day spent hunting, eating, reproducing and resting is a model for every day), is better or worse than the condition of that amazing creature who selects the down when he goes to sleep, picks out a thread of silk when he gets dressed, who has changed the cave, his first home, into a palace, and learnt how to vary his needs and commodities in a thousand different ways.

It is human nature to look for ways to be happy. What does a man need to be as happy as possible? Subsistence for the present and, if he thinks about the future, the hope and assurance that he will continue to have this. Now, does primitive man lack the satisfaction of these basic needs, except for those cases where civilised societies have confined him or driven him into the Arctic regions? If he does not keep stocks of food it is because the land and sea are stores and reserves always available to supply his needs. Fishing or hunting take

place all year round, or they supplement the scarcity of winter seasons. The primitive man does not have well-protected houses nor comfortable homes, but his furs provide him with a roof, clothing and heating. He only works for what he uses himself, he sleeps when he is tired, and he knows neither anxiety nor insomnia. Danger, like work, is a fact of his life and not a profession he is born into, a duty he owes his nation, and not an ordeal for his family. Primitive man is serious, and not sad; you rarely see stamped on his brow the passions and disease which leave such ugly or damaging traces. He can neither lack what he does not desire, nor desire what he does not know. The commodities of life are mostly remedies for evils of which he is unaware; pleasures are relief for appetites which are not aroused in his senses. Boredom can hardly enter his soul, as he experiences neither deprivation, nor the need to feel or act, nor that void created by the prejudices of vanity. In a word, the only evils from which primitive man suffers are natural evils.

But what more does civilised man have in the way of happiness? His food is healthier and more refined than that of primitive man. He has softer clothing, and a refuge which gives better protection against the assaults of the seasons. But do the people who should be the foundation and object of social order – that mass of men who in all states support the painful labours and expenses of society – live happily, either in those empires where the results of war and social disorder have left them in slavery, or under those governments where the progress of luxury and politics has led them into servitude? Moderate governments shed some rays of happiness in a shadow of freedom, but at what price have they bought that security? By rivers of blood which for a few moments have pushed away tyranny; but that tyranny has then been allowed to return in greater fury and ferocity and, sooner or later, has come to oppress a nation. See how the Caligulas and Neros avenged the expulsion of the Tarquins and the death of Caesar.

It is said that tyranny is the work of the people and not of kings. Why is it endured? Why are the operations of despotism not resisted with as much vigour as despotism itself employs, violently and deceitfully, to gain control of all the faculties of men? But are people, under the rods of the oppressor, allowed to complain and cry out? Does that not irritate and provoke him to beat his victim to death? In his eyes the cries of the enslaved are a rebellion. They are stifled in a prison,

sometimes even on a scaffold. The person who will claim the rights of man would perish in neglect or disgrace. So the people are reduced to suffering from tyranny under the name of authority.

From that point on, what abuses are there to which civil man is not exposed? If he has some property how secure can his possession of it be? When he is obliged to share its product with the courtier (who can impound his money), with the lawyer (who sells him the means to hold on to it), with the soldier (who can plunder it), and with the financier (who comes to levy duties which, by the authority demanding them, are always unlimited)? Without property, how can lasting means of subsistence be assured? What kind of industry is protected from the events of fate and the assaults of government?

In the woods of America, if there is famine in the north, you make tracks for the south. The wind or the sun lead a wandering tribe to less severe climates. The gates and barriers which enclose our civilised states make them, in times when famine, war or plague spread death across a kingdom, a prison in which you can expire only in the slow grip of poverty or in the horror of carnage. The man who has the misfortune to be born sees that he is condemned to suffer every misery and affliction which the inclemency of the seasons and the injustice of governments can bring.

In our countryside, all year long, the hireling or the serf tills the soil to produce food for himself, only too happy when he retains part of the harvests which he has sown and tilled. He is supervised and tormented by a harsh and restless owner, who argues with him about everything, including the mattress on which, in exhaustion, he seeks a brief, disturbed sleep. Every day this unfortunate man is exposed to diseases which, in conjunction with the hunger to which he is reduced, make him prefer death to an expensive cure which will be followed by more work and disease. Tenant or subject, slave in both conditions, if he has a few acres a lord will come and harvest what he has not sown; if he were to have only a team of cattle or horses, he will be made to use them in forced labour; if all he has is himself, the prince takes him off to war. Everywhere masters, always humiliations.

In our towns, the worker and artisan who have no workplace must submit to the law of greedy and idle bosses who, through the privilege of monopoly, have bought from the government the power to make industry work for nothing and the right to sell its products at a very

high price. All that the people can see is a luxury of which they are victims twice over: first, by the hours and exhaustion it costs them, secondly, by the outrage of a splendour which humiliates and crushes them.

Even if we supposed that the dangers and labours of our destructive occupations – quarries, mines, forges and all works involving fire, navigation and commerce across the oceans – were less painful or harmful than the wandering life of hunters or fishermen; even if we believed that those men who suffer from punishments, affronts and ills which only relate to matters of opinion, are less unfortunate than primitive men who, however much in agony and even torture, do not shed a tear; nevertheless, there would still be an infinite distance between the lot of civil man and primitive man, a difference wholly to the detriment of the social state. It is the injustice which prevails in the artificial inequality of fortunes and conditions – an inequality which is born of oppression and reproduces it.

Habit, prejudice, ignorance or work can never degrade the people so far as to prevent them feeling their degradation. Neither religion nor morality can blind them to the injustice of the division of good and ill among men in the political order. How often have we not heard the man of the people ask heaven what crime he had committed to be put on earth in a state of extreme hardship and dependence? Whether or not higher social status inevitably brings terrible troubles, which perhaps cancel out all the advantages and superiority of the civil state over the state of nature, for the lowly, anonymous man who does not know these troubles, high rank means nothing but the abundance which causes his poverty. He envies the wealthy for pleasures which (through habit) have become indifferent to those in a position to enjoy them. What servant can love his master? What valet is truly devoted? What prince is really loved by his courtiers, even when he is hated by his subjects? If we prefer our condition to that of primitive people it is because civil life has made us incapable of supporting certain natural ills to which the primitive man is more exposed than we are. It is because we are attached to certain refinements which through habit have become necessary to us. It is even the case that in time a civilised man among primitive men will become used to the state of nature. Take that Scotsman who, marooned alone on the Island of Fernandez, was only unhappy up to the time when physical needs came to occupy him so completely that he forgot his homeland, his

language, his name and even how to articulate words. After four years this European felt relieved of the great burden of social life; he enjoyed the happiness of having lost the use of reflection and thought by which he recalled the past or was tormented about the future.

Finally, as a sense of independence is one of the basic human instincts, the person who adds to the enjoyment of this primitive right the moral security of adequate subsistence is incomparably happier than the rich man surrounded by laws, masters, prejudices and fashions which continually make him feel the loss of his freedom. Does not a comparison of the condition of primitive man with that of children settle the question, so energetically discussed by philosophers, of the respective advantages of the state of nature and the social state? Are not children, for all the constraints of education, in the happiest age of human life? Is their habitual cheerfulness, when they are free from the rod of pedantry, not the surest sign of their happiness? After all, one word could end this great debate. Ask civil man if he is happy. Ask primitive man if he is unhappy. If both answer 'No', the dispute is settled.

Civilised people, this parallel is no doubt painful for you, but you are not fully aware of the calamities under whose weight you are suffering. The more grievous this sensation becomes, the more you will have to pay attention to the true causes of your ills. Perhaps in the end you will come to be convinced that they arise from the distortion of your opinions, the vices of your political constitutions, and the bizarre laws which are a continual offence against the laws of nature.

20 EQUALITY

(Book Eighteen, Ch. 2; VIII, 129-30)

[The religious system of the Anabaptists] appeared to be based on charity and gentleness. It produced only robberies and crimes. The chimera of equality is the most dangerous of all beliefs in a civilised society. To preach this system to the people is not to recall its rights, it is to invite the people to murder and pillage; it is to unchain domestic animals and transform them into wild beasts. It is necessary to soften and enlighten either the masters who govern them or the laws which guide them. In nature there is only an equality of right, and never an equality of fact. Even primitive men become unequal as soon as they

live together in groups. They are only equal when they wander through the woods; and even the person who allows his catch to be taken from him is not the equal of the person who seizes it. That is the first origin of all societies.

21 THE LEGITIMACY OF GOVERNMENT; THE
AMERICAN REVOLUTION (i)
(Book Eighteen, Ch. 42; VIII, 273-9)

The principles which justified [the revolution of English America] began to spread on all sides. These principles, born in Europe and especially in England, had been transmitted to America by philosophy. The home country's own enlightenment was used against itself, and people said, 'Great care should be taken not to confuse societies and government.' To understand societies, let us examine their origin.

Man is thrown as if by chance onto this earth, surrounded by all the natural evils, continually obliged to defend and protect his life against the storms and gales of the air, against the flooding of water, against the eruptions and fires of volcanoes, against the extremes of freezing or scorching regions, against the earth's barrenness (refusing to provide food) or its unfortunate abundance (making poisons flourish), against the teeth of wild animals which compete with him for prey or for territory, and who in fighting him seem to want to become themselves ruler of this earth, of which he regards himself the master. In this situation man alone and on his own could do nothing to preserve himself. So he had to unite and associate with his fellows, to make common use of their strength and intelligence. It is by this union that he triumphed over so many ills, that he made the earth serve his purpose, kept back rivers and seas, ensured his subsistence, subdued some of the animals by forcing them to serve him, and pushed the others far away from his territory, into the depths of deserts or woods where their number grows less each century. What a single man could not have done, men together have carried out and preserved. Such is the origin, advantage and aim of society.

Government owes its origin to the necessity of preventing and curbing the injuries which the members had to fear from one another. It is the guard who keeps watch so that the common work is not disturbed.

In this way society is produced by our wants, and government by our wickedness. Society always tends to the good, government ought always to aim at curbing evil. Society comes first; in its origin it is independent and free. Government has been established for society and is only its instrument. It is for the first to command, for the second to serve. Society has created the public force; as government has received that from society, it should devote it entirely to society's use. Finally, society is essentially good; government, as we know, can be (and only too often is) bad.*

It has been said that we were all born equal, but this is not so. Or that we all have the same rights; but I do not know what rights can mean where there is inequality of talents or strength and no guarantee or sanction. Or that Nature offers us all the same dwelling and same resources, but this is not so. Or that we were all endowed with the same means of defence, but this is not so. And I do not know in what sense it can be true that we all enjoy the same qualities of mind and body. Among men there is an original inequality which nothing can remedy. It must last forever, and all that one can obtain from the best legislation is not to destroy it but to prevent abuses arising out of it.

But in dividing her children like a cruel mother, in creating those who are weak and those who are strong, has Nature herself not formed the seed of tyranny? I do not think that that can be denied; especially if you go back to the time before all legislation, when you see man as passionate and unreasonable as animals.

What then have legislators and founders of nations proposed? To obviate all the catastrophes, which this seed (if developed) would bring, by a kind of artificial equality, which would submit all members of a society without exception to a single, impartial authority. It is a sword which hangs indiscriminately above all heads. But that was an ideal sword. It needed a hand, a physical being, to hold it.

What has been the result? The history of civilised man has been only the history of his misery. Every page has been covered in blood, some with the blood of oppressors, others with the blood of the oppressed.

From this perspective man appears more evil and unhappy than animals. The different species of animals survive at the expense of

* In this paragraph Diderot drew on the opening section of Paine's *Common Sense* (1776). Paine subsequently published an open letter to Raynal (1782) in which he complained about the plagiarism.

one another, but human societies have never stopped attacking themselves. In a single society there is no class which does not devour and is not devoured, whatever have been or may be the forms of the government or artificial equality which arose in opposition to primitive (or natural) inequality.

But are these forms of government – made by the choice (and the free choice) of our first ancestors, whatever sanction they may have had, either by oath or unanimous consent or permanence – obligatory for those who come later? There is no such obligation, and it is impossible that you, Englishmen, who have undergone such a sequence of different revolutions in your political constitution – tossed from monarchy to tyranny, from tyranny to aristocracy, from aristocracy to democracy, from democracy to anarchy – can think differently from me without being accused of rebellion and perjury.

We are examining matters as *philosophes*, and it is well known that it is not our speculation which leads to civil disturbances. No subjects are more patient than we are. So I shall pursue my subject, without fear of the consequences. If the people are happy under their form of government, they will keep it. If they are unhappy, it will not be because of your opinions or mine; it will be on account of the impossibility of suffering any further or longer, which will prompt them to change it – a salutary movement which the oppressor will call revolt, although it is only the legitimate exercise of an oppressed person's natural and inalienable right, a right enjoyed even by the person who is not oppressed.

We will, and choose, for ourselves. We cannot will or choose for another. It would be senseless to will or choose for someone who is not yet born, for someone whose existence is still centuries away. There is no individual who, discontented with the form of his country's government, cannot go elsewhere in search of a better. There is no society which cannot change its government, exercising the same freedom which its ancestors used in setting it up. In this respect societies are as if they were at the first moment of their civilisation. Without this, there would be a great evil. What am I saying? The greatest of evils would be without remedy. Millions of men would have been condemned to a misfortune without end. So conclude with me:

There is no form of government which has an immutable prerogative;

There is no political authority, whether created yesterday or one thousand years ago, which cannot be abrogated in ten years or tomorrow;

No power, however respectable or sacred, is authorised to regard the state as its property;

Whoever thinks otherwise is a slave; he treats the work of his own hands as an idol;

Whoever thinks otherwise is an idiot who subjects himself to eternal misery, and his family, children and the children of his children likewise, by granting his ancestors the right to lay down the law for him when he was not there, and by taking away this right from his descendants who are not yet born.

All authority in this world began with the consent of the subjects or with the strength of the master. In either case it can end up being legitimate. Nothing prescribes tyranny against liberty.

The truth of these principles is particularly essential because all power by its nature tends towards despotism, even in the nation which is quickest to take offence, among you, the English, yes, among you.

I heard it said to a Whig – fanatical words, perhaps, but words of great sense sometimes emerge from the stupid – that as long as a bad sovereign, or at least a bad minister, was not led to Tyburn⁵ with as little formality, ceremonial, disturbance and surprise as the most obscure criminal, the nation would not have its rights, nor the correct idea or full enjoyment of those rights appropriate to a people which dares to regard itself, or call itself, free. Yet a government which you yourselves admit to be ignorant, corrupt and reckless, is arrogantly and with impunity hurtling you into the deepest abyss.

The amount of money you have in circulation is very slight. You are overrun by paper currency of all kinds and denominations. All the gold in Europe collected into your Treasury would hardly be sufficient to pay off your national debt. No one knows through what incredible prestige this fictional money holds its value. The slightest event could, in a single day, plunge it into discredit. A single alarm could lead to sudden bankruptcy. The terrible effects of such loss of faith are beyond our imagination. And this is the moment you choose to declare to your colonies (that is to say, to raise up against yourselves) an unjust, senseless, ruinous war. What will become of you,

⁵ Until the late eighteenth century, public executions in London were held at Tyburn, at the north-east corner of Hyde Park.

when an important branch of your commerce will be destroyed, when you have lost a third of your possessions, when you have massacred one or two million of your countrymen, when your forces are exhausted, your merchants ruined, your manufacturers reduced to die of hunger, your debt increased and your revenue diminished? Take care. The blood of the Americans will sooner or later fall on your heads. Its shedding will be avenged by your own hands, and you have almost reached that moment.

'But,' you say, 'they are rebels.' Rebels! Why? Because they do not wish to be your slaves. A people subject to the will of another people, who can dispose as they please of its government, laws, and commerce; who can tax it as they please, limit its industry, and restrict it by arbitrary prohibitions – that people is a serf, yes, a serf. And its servitude is worse than what it would suffer under a tyrant. You can escape from the oppression of a tyrant either by expelling him or by killing him. You Englishmen have done both. But you cannot kill or drive out a nation. You can only hope for freedom by a complete break, the effect of which is the ruin of one or other of the nations, and sometimes of both. A tyrant is a monster with a single head, which can be brought down with a single blow. A despotic nation is a hydra with a thousand heads which can only be cut off by a thousand swords raised at the same time. The crime of oppression performed by a tyrant concentrates all indignation against him alone. The same crime committed by a numerous society spreads the horror and shame over a crowd which never blushes. It is the fault of everyone and no one. And the distraught sense of despair does not know where to focus its pain.

22 THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION (ii)

(Book Eighteen, Ch. 42; VIII, 286–7)

Perhaps you English have only allowed yourselves to be led by some false point of honour to fill the New World with bloodshed and slaughter. We would love to be persuaded that so much wrong has not been the result of a coldly thought-out plan. You have been told that the Americans were only an abject bunch of cowards whom the least threat would bring, alarmed and trembling, to agree to everything you wanted to demand. Instead of the feeble men described and promised, you met brave people, true Englishmen, worthy of being your

fellow citizens. Is that a reason to be cross? What? Your ancestors admired the Batavian shaking the Spanish yoke, and you, their descendants, are astonished that your compatriots and brothers, those who felt your blood running through their veins, would have preferred to water the earth with their blood and to die, rather than live as slaves? A foreigner, on whom you had formed the same designs, would have disarmed you if, showing you his bare chest, he had said to you, 'Plunge in your sword or let me go free.' And you murder your brother and do so without remorse because he is your brother! Englishmen! What is more shameful than the violence of a man who is proud of his own freedom and attacks the freedom of someone else? Do you want us to think that the greatest enemy of freedom is the free man? Alas! We are only too liable to believe that! Enemies of kings, you wear their expression. Enemies of the royal prerogative, you apply it everywhere. Everywhere you display yourselves as tyrants. Ah well, tyrants of nations and colonies, if you are the strongest it is because heaven has shut its ear to the wishes which reach it from all the countries of the earth.

Since the seas have not swallowed up your proud satellites, tell me what will happen to them if in the New World there appears an elegant man who promises eternal salvation to those who will die, weapon in hand, as martyrs of freedom? Americans! Let us see your priests constantly in their pulpits, wreaths in their hands, pointing to the open skies. Priests of the New World, the time has come: make up for the fanaticism which once ravaged and laid waste America by a happier fanaticism, born of politics and freedom. No, you will not betray your fellow citizens. God, who is the principle of order and justice, hates tyrants. He has printed on the heart of man this sacred love of freedom; he does not want servitude to disfigure and degrade his most beautiful work. If any man deserves apotheosis, it is undoubtedly he who fights and dies for his country. Put his image in your temples, close to the altars. That will be the religion for your country. Form a political and religious calendar in which each day will be marked by the name of one of these heroes who will have shed his blood to make you free. Your descendants will read about them one day with holy respect. They will say, 'These are the men who have freed half the world, and who, working for our happiness before we were even conceived, prevented our being born to the sound of chains banging on our cradles.'

23 THE EXAMPLE OF NORTH AMERICA

(Book Eighteen, Ch. 43; VIII, 292-3)

[Diderot envisages a wise Englishman applauding the colonists:]

'May agriculture, industry, laws, arts and the first of all sciences – that of doing the greatest good for states and men – improve among you. May the news of your happiness bring to your homes all the unfortunate people of the earth. May all tyrants and oppressors, either political or religious, know that a place exists in the world where people can cast off their chains; where persecuted humanity has raised up its head again; where the harvest grows for the poor; where the laws are no more than the guarantee of happiness; where religion is free and conscience is no longer a slave; where nature finally seems to want to be justified in having created man; and where the government, for so long so guilty over all the earth, finally made good its crimes. May the idea of such a sanctuary frighten the despots and restrain them; for if the happiness of men is indifferent to them, at least they are ambitious and greedy enough to want to retain both their power and wealth.

'We ourselves, oh my friends and fellow citizens, shall profit from your example. If our constitution is changed; if public wealth corrupts the court, and the court corrupts the nation; if our kings, to whom we have given so many terrible examples, finally forget them; if we, who were a distinguished nation, should be threatened with becoming the most abject and cowardly herd, by selling ourselves; then the spectacle of your virtues and laws could re-animate us. It could recall to our degraded hearts both the price and greatness of liberty. And if this example loses its force; if slavery, the sequel to venal corruption, becomes established one day in the same country which has been bathed in blood for the sake of freedom, and where our fathers have seen scaffolds erected for tyrants; then we shall collectively abandon this ungrateful land given over to despotism and leave the monster to reign over a desert. You will then receive us as friends and brothers. You will share with us that soil, that free air, as the souls of their generous inhabitants. And thanks to your virtues we will find again England and a *patrie*.'

24 THE ORIGIN OF SOCIETY; THE LAWS OF
NATURE/HISTORY

(Book Nineteen, Ch. 2; IX, 39-42)

[Diderot attacks the idea that in a state of nature men were isolated.] Men were never isolated. They carried within them a seed of sociability which tended continually to be developed. If not, they would have wanted to separate themselves from one another, which they could not have done. They would have been able to enjoy isolation (even if they should not have done so), had it not been the case that the vices of association were compensated by greater benefits.

The weakness and length of man's childhood; the nakedness of his body, without hair or feathers; the perfectibility of his mind, which is a necessary consequence of the length of his life; the love of a mother (which grows greater with trouble and care), who after she has carried her offspring within her for nine months, then feeds the child and carries it in her arms for years; the reciprocal attachment, bred of that habit of two beings who caress and comfort one another; the multiplication of signs of communication in a physical system which joins to the accents of the voice, common to so many animals, the language of fingers and gestures, which is specific to the human species; the natural events which can in a hundred ways bring together and unite free and wandering individuals; the accidents and unforeseen needs which force them to meet in order to hunt, fish, or even defend themselves; finally, the example of so many species whose members live in groups, such as amphibious and marine monsters, the flights of cranes and other birds, even the insects which are found in clusters or swarms; all these facts and arguments seem to prove that man has a natural tendency to sociability and that he came to it so much more quickly because he cannot inhabit the torrid zones without forming himself into nomadic or settled tribes, nor spread out in the other zones without associating with his fellows for prey and the booty he requires to feed and clothe himself.

From the need to associate derives the need to have laws relative to that condition, that is to say, to form, by combining all common and individual instincts, a general combination which maintains the mass and plurality of individuals. For if nature pushes man towards man, it is without doubt a result of that universal attraction which tends to reproduction and preservation. All the inclinations which man has in

society, all the habits he derives from it, should be subordinated to this first impulse. Since to live and multiply is the goal of all living species, it seems that sociability, if it is one of the first faculties of man, should contribute to nature's dual aim, and that the instinct which leads him to the social state should necessarily direct all moral and political laws, from which a longer and happier existence would result for the majority of men. However, looking at what has taken place, you would say that all societies have only had as their principle and their supreme law the security of the dominant power. Where does this remarkable contrast come from – between the end and the means, between the laws of nature and those of politics?

It is a difficult question to answer adequately without having a proper notion of nature and the succession of different governments; and history scarcely gives us any help on this great subject. All the foundations of current society are lost in the ruins of some catastrophe or physical revolution. Everywhere we see men driven by the flames of the earth or the fires of war, by floods or water or devouring insects, by scarcity or famine, to come together in some corner of the uninhabited world or to disperse and spread out in already populated regions. Everywhere civilisation begins with pillage, and order with anarchy. But to arrive at some result which would satisfy reason we must neglect these momentary shocks and consider nations in a stationary and peaceful condition, which allows a free course to the production of phenomena.

It has been said that there are two worlds, the physical and the moral. The wider you range in thought and in experience, the more convinced you will become that there is only one world, the physical, which directs everything when it is not opposed by fortuitous causes. Without such causes we would have continually seen the same inter-connection in the most surprising moral developments, such as the origin of religious ideas, the advances of the human mind, the discovery of truths, the birth and continuation of error, the beginning and end of prejudices, the formation of societies and the periodic order of different governments.

All civilised people were once primitive; and all primitive people, left to their natural impulse, were destined to become civilised. The family was the first society; and the first government was patriarchy, founded on love, obedience and respect. The family grows and divides. Opposed interests lead to war between brothers who do not

recognise one another. One people takes up arms against another. The vanquished become the slaves of the victor, who divides up their fields, wives and children. The country is governed by a leader, his lieutenants and his soldiers, who represent the free part of the nation, while all the rest are subjected to the atrocities and humiliation of servitude. In this anarchy, mixed with jealousy and ferocity, the peace is soon disturbed. These anxious men march against one another; they are eliminated. With time there remains only a monarch or a despot. Under the monarch there is a hint of justice; legislation makes some progress; ideas of property develop, the name of slave is changed into that of subject. Under the supreme will of despotism there is only terror, servility, flattery, stupidity, superstition. That intolerable situation ends either with the assassination of the tyrant or the dissolution of the empire, and democracy arises on this corpse. Then for the first time the sacred name of *patrie* is heard. Then the humbled man lifts up his head and shows himself in all his dignity. Then the annals are filled with heroic deeds. Then there are fathers, mothers, children, friends, fellow citizens, public and domestic virtues. Then laws reign, genius takes wing, sciences are born, and useful work is no longer held in low esteem.

Unfortunately, this state of happiness lasts only a moment. Everywhere revolutions in government succeed one another with a speed that can scarcely be grasped. There are few countries which have not suffered them all, and there is none which, in time, does not complete this periodic movement. All will follow, more or less often, a regular circle of prosperity and misfortune, liberty and slavery, morality and corruption, enlightenment and ignorance, greatness and weakness; all pass through every point of this fatal horizon. The law of nature, which wills that every society should gravitate towards despotism and dissolution, that empires should be born and die, will not be suspended for any exception.

25 ENLIGHTENED DESPOTS

(Book Nineteen, Ch. 2; IX, 51-2)

People say that the most-fortunate kind of government would be that of a just, resolute and enlightened despot.⁶ What nonsense! Could it

⁶ In a discussion of the physiocrats' notion of 'legal despotism', in the *Correspondance littéraire* of 1 October 1767, Grimm observed that it was a commonplace that 'the

not be that the will of such an absolute master would contradict that of his subjects? Would he not then be wrong, in spite of all his justice and enlightenment, to deprive them of their rights, even if it were for their advantage? Is it ever permissible for a single man, whoever he may be, to treat those for whom he is responsible like a herd of animals? We force the latter to leave a bad pasture and go into a good one, but would it not be tyranny to employ the same violence on a society of men? If they say 'We like it here', or even if they say 'It is true that we are unhappy here, but we want to stay', then you should endeavour by means of persuasion, and never by force, to disabuse them, enlighten them, and lead them to a clearer perception of things. However virtuous he might be, any prince who did good contrary to the general will would be a criminal, for the simple reason that he had exceeded his rights. He would be wrong not only now, but also in the future; because if he were just and enlightened, his successor, without inheriting his virtue and reason, would certainly inherit his authority, and the nation would be the victim. A first despot who was just, resolute and enlightened would be a great evil; a second would be a greater evil; a third would be the most terrible scourge a nation could ever suffer. People escape from slavery when it has been forced on them suddenly and violently. They never emerge from it when it has been brought about by justice and confirmed by time. If a nation's sleep heralds the loss of its freedom, what sleep can be sweeter, deeper and more treacherous than that which has lasted three reigns, and been lulled by the hands of benevolence?

People! Do not allow your supposed masters to take action against your general will, even for the sake of good. Remember that the

government of an enlightened, active, vigilant, wise and resolute despot is the most desirable and perfect kind of government'. He added that this was his own view as well: 'I love such despots passionately.' By dedicating *De l'homme* (1772) to Catherine II and Frederick II of Prussia, Helvétius also indicated his approval of such figures. Despite this, however, it would be wrong to suppose that there was widespread support among the *philosophes* for enlightened despotism, and the term itself was rarely used before the nineteenth century. Diderot himself on at least one occasion wrote of 'a just and enlightened despotism (*un despotisme juste et éclairé*)', in his *Mémoires pour Catherine II* (ed. Vemière, Paris 1966), p. 118, but he usually referred to an 'enlightened despot', as in this passage, which draws on the *Observations sur le Nakaz* (vii and, for the final sentence, xxii). His criticism also occurs earlier in the *Histoire* (Book Three, Ch. 2; i, 316). It first appears in his writings in the *Fragments politiques*, which were included in the *Correspondance littéraire* of 15 August 1772, and features in his *Réfutation d'Helvétius* and the *Essai sur la vie de Sénèque*. See the *Œuvres complètes de Diderot*, ed. Lewinter, x, 74-5; and the *Œuvres complètes*, ed. Assézat-Tourneux, II, 381, and III, 265, respectively.

condition of the person governing you is like that of the Indian chief who, when asked if he had any slaves, replied: 'Slaves? I am only aware of one slave in my country, and that is me.'

26 POLITICAL CHANGE

(Book Nineteen, Ch. 2; IX, 115-16)

The state is a very complicated machine which one can neither assemble nor set in motion without knowing all the pieces. You cannot press nor loosen a single one without disturbing all the others. Any project useful for one class of citizens, or for one moment of crisis, can become fatal for the whole nation and harmful for a long future. Destroy or denature a great political body, and these convulsive movements called *coups d'état* will affect the mass of the nation and perhaps be felt for centuries. All innovations should be gradual, born from need, inspired by a kind of public clamour, or at least in accord with general wishes. To create or destroy suddenly is to corrupt the good and make the evil worse. To act without consulting the general will, without collecting, so to speak, the majority of votes that form public opinion, is to alienate hearts and minds, to discredit everything, even the upright and good.

27 LAWS AND THE PUBLIC GOOD

(Book Nineteen, Ch. 2; IX, 117-18)

In the happy condition of social order and enlightenment which Europe has reached, we are very aware that the conviction of mind which produces a free, acceptable and general obedience can only arise from a certain demonstration of the utility of the laws. If governments do not wish to bribe thinkers – who would perhaps become suspect or corrupt once they were hirelings – they should at least allow superior minds to watch over the public good in some way. Every writer of genius is born magistrate of his country. He should enlighten it, if he can. His right is his talent. Whether he is an obscure or a distinguished citizen, whatever his rank or his birth, if his mind is always noble he is qualified by his intelligence. His court is the whole nation; his judge is the public at large, not the despot who does not hear him, or the minister who does not wish to listen.

No doubt, all truths have their limits; but it is always more

dangerous to stifle freedom of thought than to abandon it to its inclination, to its ardour. Reason and truth triumph from the activity of good minds, which only grow angry by being restricted and grow irritable by being persecuted. Kings and ministers, love your people; love men and you will be happy. You then have no reason to fear free and discontented minds, nor the revolt of the wicked. The revolt that occurs in people's hearts is much more dangerous; for virtue grows bitter and indignant to the point of atrocity. Cato and Brutus were virtuous; they only had to choose between two great offences, suicide or the death of Caesar.

Remember that the interest of the government is only that of the nation. Whoever divides in two this simple interest has a poor knowledge of government and can only have a bad effect on it. Authority divides this great interest when individuals' wills are substituted for the established order. The laws and the laws alone should reign.

28 MORALITY

(Book Nineteen, Ch. 14; IX, 291-4)

If there is a universal morality, it cannot be the effect of a particular cause. It has been the same in times past, and it will be the same in centuries to come. It cannot, therefore, have its basis in religious opinions which, from the origin of the world and from the North Pole to the South Pole, have always varied. The Greeks had wicked gods; the Romans had wicked gods; the stupid person adoring a fetish prefers a devil to a god. Each people makes gods, as it pleases: some good, others cruel; some debauched, others ascetic. You could say that each people has wanted to deify its own passions and opinions. In spite of this diversity of religious systems and cults, all nations have felt that it was necessary to be just. All nations have honoured – as virtues – goodness, pity, friendship, loyalty, sincerity, gratitude, love of the *patrie*, paternal tenderness and filial respect, all the feelings which can be regarded as so many bonds suited to unite men most closely. We should therefore not look for the origin of this unanimity of judgement, so general and constant, among contradictory and short-lived opinions. If ministers of religion have appeared to think otherwise, it is because through their systems they became the masters of regulating all men's actions, and of disposing all that men owned and wanted. In the name of heaven they endorsed arbitrary

government on earth. Their rule was so absolute that they came to establish a barbarous morality which put the only pleasures which can make life bearable on the same level as the greatest crimes; an abject morality which imposed the obligation of taking delight in shame and humiliation; an extravagant morality which threatened both the frailties of love and the most appalling deeds with the same punishment; a superstitious morality which urged a pitiless death upon all those who deviated from prevailing opinions; an infantile morality which based the most essential duties on tales that were both disgusting and ridiculous; a self-interested morality which only credited as virtues qualities that were useful to the priesthood, or as crimes those which were the opposite. If priests had only encouraged men to observe natural morality out of hope or fear of future rewards or punishments, they would have been of value to society. But by wanting to maintain through violence those useful dogmas which can be introduced only by the gentle voice of persuasion, they dislodged the cover which hid the depths of their ambition. The mask fell.

It is more than two thousand years since Socrates, holding out a veil above our heads, announced that nothing which occurred above that veil should matter to us, and that the actions of men were not good because they pleased the gods, but pleasing to the gods because they were good: a principle which detaches morality from religion.

In the court of philosophy and reason, morality is in effect a science, the object of which is the preservation and common happiness of the human race. It is to this twin goal that moral rules should relate. Their constant and eternal physical principle is in man himself, in the similarity between the physical constitution of one man and another; a similarity which entails that of the same needs, pleasures, pains, strength and weakness. This is the source of the necessity of society, or of a common struggle against the common dangers which arise from the heart of nature itself, threatening man from a hundred different sides. This is the origin of individual bonds and domestic virtues, and of general bonds and public virtues. This is the source of the notion of personal and general utility, and of all individual pacts and laws.

There is properly only one virtue, which is justice; and only one duty, which is to be happy. The virtuous man is the person who has the most precise notions of justice and happiness and who makes his conduct conform to them most rigorously. There are two tribunals,

that of nature and that of laws. One concerns the offences of man against his fellows; the other, the offences of man against himself. The law punishes crimes, nature punishes vices. The law shows the assassin the gallows, nature shows the intemperate man either dropsy or consumption.

Many writers have looked for the first principles of morality in feelings of friendship, tenderness, compassion, honour and charity, because they have found them engraved on the human heart. But do they not also find there hate, jealousy, revenge, pride, love of domination? Why then have they based morality on the former feelings rather than the latter? It is because they have understood that the first contribute to the general benefit of society, and that the latter were fatal to it. These philosophers have felt the need for morality and have glimpsed what it ought to be; but they have not grasped the first and fundamental principle. In fact, the very feelings which they adopt as a foundation of morality, because they seem to them useful to the general good, could be very harmful if abandoned to themselves. How could you decide to punish the guilty man if you only listened to the voice of compassion? How could you not be partial, if you only followed the counsel of friendship? How would you not favour idleness, if you only thought in terms of charity? All these virtues have a limit, beyond which they degenerate into vices; and that limit is determined by the invariable rules of justice in its essence, or, what comes to the same thing, by the common interest of men united in society, and by the constant purpose of that union.

Is it for yourself that you erect courage into a virtue? No, it is because of its usefulness to society.

29 CONCLUSION

(Book Nineteen, Ch. 15; IX, 309-12)

[Diderot concludes with a brief survey of the calamities brought by discoveries and conquests, cruelties and greed.]

The insatiable thirst for gold has given birth to the most infamous and atrocious of all trades, that of slaves. People speak of crimes against nature and they do not cite slavery as the most horrific. The majority of European nations are soiled by it, and a vile self-interest has stifled in human hearts all the feelings we owe to our fellow men. But without these hands the countries which have been acquired at such

expense would have remained uncultivated. Ah! Leave them wild if, in order to give them value, man must be reduced to the condition of a brute, in the form of a person who buys and another who sells and a third who is sold.

Shall we count as insignificant the complications in government machinery that have ensued from the colonisation of the two Indies? Before this era the hands that were ready to hold the reins of empires were extremely rare. A more encumbered administration has demanded a more comprehensive genius and more profound knowledge. The concerns of sovereignty, divided between citizens at the foot of the throne and subjects settled on the equator or near the Pole, have been insufficient for both parties. Everything has fallen into confusion. The different states have languished under the yoke of oppression, and interminable or constantly renewed wars have worn out the world and covered it with blood.

Let us stop here and imagine ourselves at the time when America and India were unknown. I address the cruellest of Europeans and say to him, 'There are regions which will provide you with rich metals, attractive clothes, delicious food. But read this history and see what price you must pay for the discovery. Do you want it to occur or not?' Do you think there is any creature so despicable as to answer 'I want it'? Ah well! In the future there will not be a single moment when my question will not have the same force.

People, I have spoken to you of your greatest interests. I have put before you the benefits of nature and the products of industry. Too often, you must have been aware that the happiness which you glimpsed in moments of peace and commerce had been pushed far from your *patrie* by jealous greed and ambitious pride. I have appealed to that happiness which has been made remote. From the depths of my heart I have spoken up in favour of all men, with no distinction of sect or country. They have all been equal in my eyes, in relation to the same needs and the same miseries, as they are equal in the eyes of the Supreme Being, in respect of their weakness to his power.

I have not been unaware that, being subjected to masters, your fate should above all be their concern, and that speaking to you of your misdeeds was to reproach them for their errors or crimes. This reflection has not diminished my courage. I have not believed that the holy respect which one owes humanity can ever fail to be in agreement with the respect owed to its natural protectors. In my mind I

have transported myself into the council of the powers that be. I have spoken openly and without fear, and I do not have to reproach myself for having betrayed the great cause I dared to plead. I have told the sovereigns what were their duties and your rights. I have related to them the fatal effects of the inhuman power which oppresses, or the indolent and feeble power which permits oppression. I have surrounded them with images of your misfortunes, and their hearts should tremble. I have warned them that if they avert their eyes these accurate and frightening scenes will be engraved on the marble of their tombs and remain an accusation to their ashes, which posterity will trample underfoot.

But talent is not always equal to zeal. I have undoubtedly needed a great deal more of that insight which makes the means visible and that eloquence which makes the truth persuasive. Sometimes perhaps my soul has elevated my genius; but most often I have felt myself overwhelmed by my subject and my weakness.

May writers more favoured by nature finish with their masterpieces what my attempts have begun! May that chain of union and charity, which should bring all civilised nations together, extend some day, under the auspices of philosophy, from one end of the world to the other! May those nations no longer carry the example of vices and oppression to uncivilised peoples! I do not flatter myself that when that happy revolution occurs my name will still live. This feeble work, which will only have the merit of having produced better works, will undoubtedly be forgotten. But at least I will be able to say to myself that I have contributed as much as I could to the happiness of my fellow-men, and prepared, perhaps from afar, the improvement of their lot. This sweet thought will for me take the place of glory. It will be the charm of my old age, and the consolation of my final moments.

Index

- abdication 82, 99-100
- absolutism ix, xxiv, 10, 13, 88-9, 190
see also despotism; enlightened despotism
- adultery: *see* marriage
- Aeson 184
- Africa 37, 85, 186
- agriculture and farmers xxiii,
 xxv-xxvi, xxxii, 86, 108, 112-13,
 127-32, 136-7, 158-60, 164, 204
- Akiaki 38n
- Alembert, Jean le Rond d' x-xi, xxii,
 xxxvi
 'Discours préliminaire' xi
- America xxix-xxx, 100, 153, 181,
 186, 195, 198-204, 213
- American Indians xv, 38, 99, 209
- American Revolution xxviii-xxix,
 xxi, xxxvii, 198-204
- Amsterdam 15
- Anabaptists xii, 197
- anthropology xviii, xxxiii, 192-3
- anticlericalism xxiii
- anticolonialism xvi, xix, xxi
see also colonies and colonisation
- antiquity 140, 185-6, 189, 192
see also Greece; Rome; Sparta
- Aoutourou xvi, 39-40
- Aphrodite xvi
- Apollo 154
- Apologie de l'abbé Galiani*
 (Diderot) vii-viii
- Aristotle xv, 15, 23
- armies: *see* military and militias
- 'Art', *Encyclopédie* (Diderot) xi, 2, 5-6
- artisans 5-6
- arts and crafts x, xxxii, 5-6, 23-4,
 26, 112, 170, 178, 185, 204
see also fine arts
- arts (liberal and mechanical) xi, 5,
 130
- Asia 85, 90, 174
- assemblies 81-2, 90, 93, 118, 173,
 189
see also Estates General
- Assembly of Notables 10
- Asto 47-9, 54, 65
- atheism xi, xxxii, 28
- Athens and Athenians 14, 56
- Atlantic Ocean 37
- Atlantis 192
- Australia 37n
- authority xi-xii, xxv, 6-13, 19, 23,
 39, 48, 51, 81-2, 85, 94, 99-100,
 107, 126, 157, 180, 189, 194,
 200, 210
- 'Autorité politique', *Encyclopédie*
 (Diderot) xii, 2-3, 6-12
- Bacon, Francis 28
- Baker, Polly xvii, 32-3, 56n, 57-8
- bankruptcy 121-2, 139, 210
- barbarism 87, 101, 112, 123, 147,
 156, 170, 182
- Barbeyrac, Jean 12n
- Barre 47
- Basel 15
- Batavian: *see* Dutchmen

- Bayeux 56n
 Bayle, Pierre xii, 28
 Beauce 40
 Beccaria, Cesare xxi, 118-19
 Dei delitti e delle pene 118
 Benot, Yves, ed 78, 166
 Diderot: Textes politiques 78-9
 Berlin 112
 Berthier, Guillaume-François 11n
 Bible 8, 29, 71n, 126
 Bielfeld, baron Jacob Friedrich von xxi
 biology xxi, xxii
 Bordeu, Théophile de xxii
 Boston 57
 Bougainville, Louis Antoine de xvi, xviii, xx-xi, 32-3, 35-41, 46-7
 Voyage autour du monde xvi, xviii, 32-3, 36-7
 Bourlet de Vauxcelles, abbé Simon Jerome 32
 Boyle, Robert 28n
 Brazil 179
 bribery 92-3, 96, 209
 Brucker, Jacob xiv, xxi, 2
 Historia critica philosophiae xiv
 Brutus 210
 Buffier, père Claude xii
 Burgundy 47

 Caesar, Julius xxix, 13, 194, 210
 Cain 12
 Calabria 72
 Caligula 194
 Canada 192
Candide (Voltaire) xxxvi
 cannibalism 38
 Cape of Good Hope 37
 Capet, Hugh 11
 capital city 86, 128, 145, 171, 177-8
 Carlière, Madame de la 74
 Carmelites 135
 Catherine II (Empress of Russia) xxi-xxvii, xxi, xxvi, 33, 78, 82, 84, 87, 89-91, 94-5, 111, 123, 164, 208n
 Cato 210
Ceci n'est pas un conte (Diderot) xvii, 74n
 celibacy 49, 64-5, 128, 146-7
 see also marriage
 Chambers, Ephraim x, 22
 Cyclopedia x, 22
 chaplain, the 47-56, 59-66, 68-70, 75
 Charles I (King of England) xxix, 191
 Chaux, Mademoiselle de la 74
 Chechulin, M. D. 78
 chemistry xxii, 185
 children xix-xx, 16, 20, 28, 38, 42-5, 47-8, 52-65, 68, 70, 103, 112, 128, 141, 146-8, 197
 China and Chinese 100-1, 155, 175
 Chinard, Gilbert 33, 56n
 Christ xv, 30
 Christians and Christianity xx-xxi, 29
 Church ix-x, 97, 115, 122, 157, 173
 see also priest; religion
 'Cité', *Encyclopédie* (Diderot) xii, 12-14
 citizen 13-17, 28-9, 44, 51, 67, 93, 97, 114, 155, 186, 189, 207
 'Citoyen', *Encyclopédie* (Diderot) xii, 14-17
 civilisation xviii-xix, xxii, xxviii, xxx, xxxii, xxxiv, 20, 27, 39, 63, 66-7, 69, 72-3, 86-7, 97, 101-2, 112, 114, 170, 173, 178-9, 193-7, 199, 206, 214
 civil society xii-xiv, 12-17, 27, 186, 195-7, 206
 see also society, origin of
 civil war 174-5
 Clement VIII (Pope) 56n
 climate xxxiii, 66, 85, 100, 143
 Colbert, Jean-Baptiste 154
 colonies and colonisation xvii-xxviii, 175-7, 213
 see also anticolonialism
 commerce: *see* trade
 commercial society xv, xxvii-xxviii
Common Sense (Paine) xxx-xxx, 199n
 competition 107, 130, 138, 159, 162-3
 Connecticut 57
 consent xii, xxv, 6-14, 53, 90, 200-1
 Constantinople 85, 96, 118, 152, 164n
 see also Ottoman Empire
 constitutionalism xxix
 contract: *see* social contract

- Contract social* (Rousseau) xiv, xciii, xcvi, 3
Correspondance littéraire (Grimm) xvi–xvii, 32, 207–8n
corruption xv–xvi, xxv–xxvi, xxviii–xxx, 10, 23, 27, 83, 95–6, 101, 142, 151, 156, 170, 184, 188, 190–1, 204, 207
corps dépositaire: see intermediary powers
Cossacks 112
coup d'état 209
Court (royal) 87, 96, 122, 150, 172, 180, 204
courts (legal): see judicial system
Cracow 13
crime and criminals 21, 37, 44, 50–2, 57–8, 61–2, 70–1, 73, 83, 102–4, 116–22, 130, 174, 178–9, 181–2, 211–12
customs (*douane*): see taxation
Cyclopedia (Chambers) x, 22
Danes 186
debts and credit 120–2, 172, 201
decadence: see corruption
De cive (Hobbes) 28n
Dei delitti e delle pene (Beccaria) 118
De jure naturae et gentium (Pufendorf) xiv, 12n
De l'esprit (Helvétius) xxxvi
De l'homme (Helvétius) 208n
democracy xxix, 16–17, 84, 91, 106–7, 157, 186, 189, 200, 207
De officio hominis et civis (Pufendorf) xiv
De rerum natura (Lucretius) xxxii
Descartes, René xxxii
Deschamps, Dom Léger-Marie xviii
despotism xxiii–xxiv, xxvi, xxviii, xxxi, 3, 16, 82, 84, 89–91, 99, 106, 108, 116, 123, 126, 164, 174, 188–91, 207
see also absolutism; enlightened despotism; tyranny
Desroches, chevalier 74
Dialogues sur le commerce des blés (Galiani) xv
Dictionnaire philosophique (Voltaire) xxiii
Diderot
Apologie de l'abbé Galiani vii–viii
'Art' xi, 2, 5–6
'Autorité politique' xii, 2–3, 6–12
Ceci n'est pas un conte xvii, 74n
'Cité' xii, 12–14
'Citoyen' xii, 14–17
'Droit naturel' xiii–xv, xxxiii, 2–3, 17–21
'Eclectisme' xxxi
'Encyclopédie' xi, xxvi, xxix, xxxiii, 21–7
Essai sur la vie de Sénèque xxx–xxxii, 208n
Essai sur les règnes de Claude et de Néron vii, xxxi
Fragments politiques 208n
Histoire des Deux Indes vii–viii, xvi, xxiv, xxvi, xxvii–xxxiii, 78, 165–214
'Hobbisme' xiv–xv, 21n
'Intolérance' xii, 2, 29–30
Lettre sur les aveugles xxxvi, 3
Madame de la Carlière xvii, 74n
Mémoires pour Catherine II ii, vii, xci, xxviii, 208n
Neveu de Rameau, Le xxi, xxxvi
Observations sur le Nakaz vii–viii, xiii, xxi–xxvii, xxix, xxxiii, xxxvii, 77–164, 208n
Pages contre un tyran vii–viii
Pensées philosophiques xxxvi
Plan d'une Université xci
Réfutation d'Helvétius 208n
Rêve de d'Alembert xxxii, xxxvi
Suite de l'Apologie de l'abbé de Prades xiii, 8n
Supplément au Voyage de Bougainville vii–viii, xv–xci, xxxi, xxxii, xxxvii, 31–75
'Sur les femmes' xvii
Dieckmann, Herbert 32
Discourses concerning Government (Sidney) 12n
'Discours préliminaire', *Encyclopédie* (d'Alembert) xi
Discours sur les sciences et les arts (Rousseau) xi
Discours sur l'inégalité (Rousseau) xviii, 21n
disease 43–5, 63–4, 72
dissolution (of government) xxix, 9, 16, 170, 191, 207
Divan: see Ottoman Empire

- dogma xi, 23, 114, 211
 'Droit naturel', *Encyclopédie*
 (Diderot) xiii-xv, xxxiii, 1-3,
 17-21
 Duchet, Michèle 166-7
Diderot et l'Histoire des Deux
Indes 166
 Dulac, Georges 78-9
 Dutchmen and Holland 115, 117,
 140, 146, 160, 186, 203
 duty xii-xiii, xix-xx, xxv, xxxi, 22,
 114, 125, 144, 186, 211, 214
 East Indies xvii, 169, 178, 213
 'Eclectisme', *Encyclopédie*
 (Diderot), xxxi
 economics xxi-xxii, xxv-xxvi, xxviii,
 xxx, 43, 60, 64, 132, 136-8, 140,
 159-61, 162-4
 'Economie politique', *Encyclopédie*
 (Rousseau) xiv, 3
 Edict of Nantes 10, 56n
 education xxv, 85, 93, 112-14,
 141-2, 146, 153, 164
 Elizabeth I (Queen of England) 89,
 189
 eloquence 155, 185, 189, 214
Emile (Rousseau) xxxvi
 empire xxix-xxx, 175, 178-9, 185-6,
 207, 213
 'Encyclopédie', *Encyclopédie*
 (Diderot) xi, xxvi, xxix, xxxiii,
 21-7
Encyclopédie vii-viii, x-xii, xiv-xv,
 xvii, xxvii, xxi, xxxiii, xxxvi, 1-3,
 5-30
 England and English xxix, xxxvi, 7,
 9, 11, 13, 89-90, 96, 104,
 139-40, 153, 172, 183, 186,
 188-91, 198-204
 English Parliament xxv, 90, 92,
 95-6, 189
 English Revolution xxviii, 188-91
 enlightened despotism xxiv, xxviii,
 88-9, 97n, 207-9
see also absolutism; despotism
 enlightenment xi, xxi, xxxi-xxxiii
 as a political movement ix, xxvi,
 xxx-xxx, 22-3, 83, 92, 102,
 122-3, 126, 149-50, 164, 179,
 182-4, 193, 198, 207-9
 Epicurus xxxii
 equality and inequality xxv, xxix, 13,
 16-17, 28, 70, 97, 107, 146,
 196-200
 equity: *see* justice
Esprit de l'Instruction, L' (Le
Trosne) 78
Esprit des lois (Montesquieu) xxxvi,
 15, 100n
Essai sur le caractère des femmes
 (Thomas) xvii
Essai sur les règnes de Claude et de Néron
 (Diderot) vii, xxx, 208n
 Estates General 93, 173
 Euclid xxv
 Europe and Europeans xv-xvi,
 xix-xx, xxxii-xxiv, xxvii-xxx, 37,
 40-1, 46, 61, 66, 73, 78, 85-6,
 135, 169, 176, 178-9, 181, 186,
 188, 197, 209, 212-13
 excommunication 103
 family 12-16, 44, 48, 53-5, 58, 61,
 66
 fanaticism 28, 83-5, 116, 119, 125,
 151, 188, 203
 farmers: *see* agriculture
 Ferguson, Adam xxx
 Fernandez 196
 feudalism 147, 185
 fiction xvii-xviii, xxx-xxx
 finance 139-40, 143, 159-61
 fine arts 112, 125, 140, 154-6
 Fonds Vandeul 56n, 78, 166
 Fontenelle, Bernard le Bovier de xii
Fragments politiques (Diderot) 208n
 France and French ix-x, xxiv,
 xxvii-xxxi, xxxvi-xxxvii, 9-10, 36,
 74
Frankfurter Zeitung 56n
 Franklin, Benjamin 56n
 Frederick II (King of Prussia) 112n,
 208n
 freedom and liberty ix, xii, xix-xxi,
 xxiv-xxx, 6-7, 10, 12-16, 18, 26,
 41-2, 50, 65, 69, 72, 85-6,
 89-94, 98-9, 109-10, 112, 118,
 126-7, 153-5, 164, 173-4, 181,
 185-9, 197, 200-4, 207
see also liberty and property,
 principles of; slavery
 freedom of expression xviii, xxv, xxx,
 93, 150, 182-3

- Galiani, abbé Ferdinando xxv
Dialogues sur le commerce des blés xxv
- Gardeil 74
- Gaul and Gauls 13
- general interest, general welfare: *see* public interest
- general will xiii-xiv, xdx, 19-21, 93, 208-9
- Geneva 27
- genius xi, xxx, 22-3, 25-7, 69, 73, 88, 98, 142, 149, 164, 170, 182, 184, 189-90, 207, 209, 214
- gentleman 26, 28, 33
- Gentleman's Magazine, The* 56n
- Germany and Germans 13
- Girard, abbé Gabriel xii
- God xiii, xx-xxi, xxxi, 3, 7-8, 10-11, 28-30, 49-50, 58, 61, 83-5, 114-15, 117, 126, 150, 187, 203, 213
- Goggi, Gianluigi, ed 166
Diderot: Mélanges et morceaux divers 166
Diderot: Pensées détachées 166
- gold 93, 130, 171, 176, 178, 181, 212
- government xxviii-xxx, xxv, 9-10, 15-17, 22-3, 57-8, 73, 82, 89-90, 99, 107, 113, 118, 127, 149-50, 170, 180, 185, 194, 198-204, 206-7, 213
- Greece and Greeks 74, 85, 192, 210
see also antiquity
- Grimm, Frédéric Melchior xvi-xvii, 32, 207-8n
Correspondance littéraire xvi-xvii, 32, 207-8n
- Grotius, Hugo xxii
- guilds, xxvi, 145
- Guinea 187
- Henri IV (King of France) 10, 56n, 90, 92
- Hercules 180
- Herder, Johann Gottfried von xxx
- Herod 95
- Herodias 95
- Histoire de Charles XII* (Voltaire) xxiii
- Histoire de l'Empire sous Pierre le Grand* (Voltaire) xxiii
- Histoire des Deux Indes* (Diderot) vii-viii, xvi, xxiv, xxvi, xxvii-xxxii, 78, 165-214
- Histoire des Deux Indes* (Raynal) xxvii-xxviii, xxvii, 56-7n, 166
- Historia critica philosophiae* (Brucker) xiv
- history xdx-xxx, 71, 152, 155, 177, 185, 213-14
see also philosophy of history
- Hobbes, Thomas xiii-xvi, 15, 27-9
De cive 28n
Leviathan 27
- 'Hobbesisme', *Encyclopédie* (Diderot) xiv-xv, 21n, 27-9
- Holbach, Paul Henri Thiry, baron d' x, xxxiii, xxvi
Système de la nature xxxvi
- Holland: *see* Dutchmen
- honour 21, 103, 106, 110, 118, 122, 144
- Horace x, 35
Odes 114n
Satires 35
- hospitals 141
- human nature xiii-xv, xviii-xxi, xxviii, xxxi-xxxv, 12, 19, 21, 27-9, 67, 71-4, 125, 193
- humanity and humanitarianism 20, 93, 101, 112, 116, 118, 120, 175, 178-9, 181
- incest 60-2, 71
- India 135, 213
- Indonesia 115
- industry: *see* manufactures
- inequality: *see* equality
- infamy 103, 105, 116, 119
- inheritance 146-7
- Inquiry concerning Virtue or Merit* (Shaftesbury) xi
- instability xxx, 21, 51, 61, 192

- interest and self-interest xiii-xiv,
xxvi, 5-6, 10, 16, 19-21, 23, 63,
71, 92, 97, 144, 146, 149, 155,
173, 177, 179, 212
see also public interest
- intermediary powers (*corps
dépositaire*) xxiv-xxv, 91, 93-5,
100, 151
- intolerance: *see* toleration
- 'Intolérance', *Encyclopédie*
(Diderot) xii, 2, 29-30
- Italy 95, 154-5
- James I (King of England) 190
- Japan 100
- Jaucourt, Louis, chevalier de x
- Jesuits xxxvi, 38, 85
- Journal de Trévoux, Le* 111
- Judgement of Whole Kingdoms
*Concerning the Rights of Kings and
the People, The* (anonymous) 111
- judicial system 102-19
- Justi, Johann Heinrich Gottlob
von xxii
- justice and injustice ix, xi, xiii, xxvi,
3, 7-8, 10, 15-21, 29-30, 51, 53,
57-8, 68, 121, 142, 164, 173,
175-7, 185, 190-1, 203, 210-11
see also judicial system
- Kant Immanuel xxx
- knowledge, improvement of xi, 5-6,
21-9, 43, 66, 182, 192
- labour 6, 38, 43, 57, 60, 66
- La Condamine, Charles Marie de 39
*Relation d'un voyage dans l'intérieur de
l'Amérique méridionale* 39n
- laissez-faire xxv-xxvi
see also trade
- La Mettrie, Julien Offroy de xxxii
- Lancer's Island 38
- Langres x, xxxvi
- language 23-4, 28, 36, 40-2
- Lapiths 192
- law and legislation xdi, xdv-xxv,
xxix, xxxiii-xxxiv, 8, 10, 12, 15,
20-1, 25, 27, 29, 38, 40, 50-3,
57-8, 61-2, 66-7, 69, 72-4, 81,
84-5, 88-9, 91-3, 97, 99-101,
104-6, 112, 115, 124, 143,
148-50, 180, 185-6, 190, 199,
204-5, 209-12
- law of nature xiv, xdi, xxiii, xxv, xxx,
xxxii, 8, 52, 67, 88, 101-2, 105,
148, 150, 156, 197, 206-7
- law of *Portia* 15
- La Reymer 74
- legal despotism: *see* enlightened
despotism
- legislator 52, 74, 81, 91, 93, 101,
105-6, 109, 111, 114, 148, 184,
193, 199
- Le Mercier de La Rivière, Pierre Paul
François xxv, 96-7
*L'Ordre naturel et essentiel des sociétés
politiques* 97n
- Leningrad: *see* St Petersburg
- Le Trosne, Guillaume François xxvi,
78, 123, 136, 154
L'Esprit de l'Instruction 78
- Lettres persanes* (Montesquieu) xix,
xxxvi
- Lettres philosophiques* (Voltaire) xxxvi
- Lettre sur les aveugles* (Diderot) xxxvi, 3
- Lewinter, Roger 79, 166
- liberty: *see* freedom
- liberty and property, principles
of xxiv, xxvi, 84, 88, 105,
107-8, 118, 124, 127, 133, 151,
164, 180
see also freedom; property
- Lillo, George 26n
The London Merchant 26
- Locke, John xii
- London 13, 118, 136, 201n
- London Magazine, The* 56n
- London Merchant, The* (Lillo) 26
- Louis XIV (King of France) ix, xxxvi,
11, 23
- Louis XV (King of France) xxix,
xxxvi-xxxvii, 3, 9
- Louis XVI (King of France) xxxvii,
171-3
- Lucretius x, xxxii
De rerum natura xxxii
- Luxemburg 135
- luxury xxv-xxvi, 43, 125, 130, 144,
146, 171, 188, 194, 196
- Madagascar 37, 110
- Madame de la Carlière* (Diderot) xvii,
74n

- Magna Carta 139
 Malesherbes, Chrétien Guillaume de
 Lamoignon de x
 mankind xi, xiii, 19-21, 24-7, 114,
 192-3, 213
 manufactures and industry xxv-xxvi,
 6, 112, 129, 131, 134-8, 140,
 145, 155, 159, 163, 204, 213
 Marcus Aurelius 71
 marriage and divorce xvii, xix-xx, 44,
 48, 50-9, 67-8, 70, 103, 146-8,
 178
 Marseilles 136
 materialism xxx, xxxii, xxxiv
 Maty, Matthew, 39
 Maupertuis, Pierre Louis Moreau
 de xxxii
 Maux, Jeanne Catherine de xvii
 Medea 184
 medicine xxxii
Mémoires (Sully) 10
Mémoires pour Catherine II
 (Diderot) ii, vii, xxi, xxviii, 208n
 merchants 84, 92, 120, 136-8, 158
 Mercury 74
 merit 97, 124-5, 130
 military and militias 84, 111-12,
 122, 153-4, 157, 180, 189-90
 Mirabeau, Victor Riqueti, marquis
 de xxv
mœurs xxxiv, 10, 20, 53, 55, 61-4,
 66-9, 72-4, 85, 101-2, 105, 114,
 118, 122, 143, 148-9, 152, 156,
 174-5
 monarchy x, xiii, xxiv-xxv, xxix, 5,
 7-11, 22-3, 28, 30, 90-1, 94,
 106-7, 151, 157, 189-91, 200,
 207
 monk: *see* priest
 monopolies 134, 138, 157, 195
 Montesquieu, Charles Louis de
 Secondat, baron de ix, xix, xxi-
 xxiv, xxxiv, xxxvi, 15, 84, 100
 Esprit des lois xxxvi, 15, 100n
 Lettres persanes xix, xxxvi
 Montpellier xxxii, 33
 morality xxx, xxxii, xxxv, 12-13,
 15-16, 18-19, 23, 28, 35, 47, 53,
 57, 62, 66-8, 70-3, 101, 123,
 177, 185, 192-3, 206-7, 210-12
 Moscow 148
 Muslims 30
 Naigeon, Jacques-André 32-3
 Nakaz xxi, xxvi, 78
 Nantes 36
 Naples 155
 nation, the 9-10, 13, 52, 56, 81-2,
 90, 100-1, 108, 142, 153, 177,
 189, 201, 210
 national character 23, 100, 177-8,
 188
 natural history 155, 185
 natural law: *see* law of nature
 natural right xi, xiii, xv, xxiv, 6-7,
 16-21, 30, 89, 93-4, 108, 126,
 146, 177, 179, 186-7, 190, 195,
 197, 199-201, 208, 214
 nature xx, xxv, xxx, xxi-xxv, 6-7,
 10, 12, 18, 21, 23, 25-8, 35, 42,
 47, 50-3, 61-2, 65-74, 89, 95-6,
 101, 108, 115, 123-5, 174, 181,
 186, 197, 199, 204-5, 210-13
 Nero xxx, 194
Neveu de Rameau, Le (Diderot) xxxi,
 xxxvi
 New England 57
 New Holland 37
 Newton, Sir Isaac xxxii
 New World xv-xvi, xxix, 177-8, 181,
 186, 203
 Nimrod 12
 nobility ix, 16, 97, 102, 113, 122,
 143, 151, 157, 173
 Nouvelle Cythère xvi

 oath 81-2, 93, 96, 100, 104, 142,
 200
Observations sur le Nakaz
 (Diderot) vii-viii, xiii, xxi-xxvii,
 xxix, xxxiii, xxxvii, 77-164, 208
Odes (Horace) 114n
 Old World xv, 177
 opinion: *see* public opinion
 optimism xxviii
Opuscules philosophiques et
 littéraires 32
Ordre naturel et essentiel des sociétés
 politiques, L' (Le Mercier de la
 Rivière) 97n
 Origen 30
 Orou 42, 46-56, 59-65, 67-8, 70,
 75
 Orthodox Church xxi
 Ossat, Cardinal Arnaud d' 56

- Ottoman Empire 10, 99, 118, 152, 164
see also Constantinople; Turkey
- Pacific Ocean xvi, 36
- Pages contre un tyran* (Diderot) vii-viii
- Paine, Thomas xxix-xxx, 199n
Common Sense xxix-xxx, 199n
- Palli 47-9, 65
- Paraguay 38
- Paris x, xxi, xxxvi-xxxvii, 13, 40, 117, 123, 135
- Parlement of Paris x, xxiv, xxxvi-xxxvii, 3, 10, 94-5
see also *Les Remontrances du Parlement de Paris*
- Parliament: *see* English Parliament
- passions xix, xxxii-xxxiv, 18-20, 28-9, 62, 68, 70, 97, 149, 169, 174, 177, 181
- Patagonians 39
- patriotism 10, 105, 143, 191, 210
- patronage 5, 22-3
- Paulists 179
- peasants 100, 125, 127-9, 144, 171, 194-5
- Pensées philosophiques* (Diderot) xxxvi
- people, the 9-11, 14-15, 81, 84, 91, 94, 96, 112, 148, 161, 173, 189-90
- Peru 160, 162
- pessimism xxviii
- Peter I, the Great (Emperor of Russia) xxi, xxii, 85-6
- Peter III (Emperor of Russia) xxi
- Philippines 37
- philosopher and *philosophe* vii, ix, 28, 38, 69, 85, 98, 115-16, 126, 192, 200, 208
- philosophy of history xi, xiii, xv, xxvii-xxx, xxxii, 23, 67, 71, 156, 173-4, 199, 206-7
see also history
- physicality xxx, xxxiii, xxxv, 12-13, 15-16, 35, 66, 206-7, 211
see also morality
- physics xxxii, xxxiv, 56, 185
- physiocracy and physiocrats xxiv-xxvi, xxxiii, 78, 91-2, 96-7, 123-5, 130, 133-4, 136-8, 154, 207
- physiology xxxii, xxxiv
- pirates xxviii, 180-2
- Plan d'une Université* (Diderot) xxi
- Plato 17n, 23, 192
- Republic* 17n
- poetry 155, 185
- Poland 9
- political economy 149-50, 155
- Polly Baker xvii, 32-3, 56n-59
- polygamy xvii, xx
- Polynesia and Polynesians xvi
- popular sovereignty xxiii, xxv, 81, 90, 148, 186
see also nation; people
- population xx, xxxii, 48, 54, 57, 62-4, 112-13, 127-8, 148, 158
- Porte, the: *see* Ottoman Empire
- Portugal and Portuguese 115, 186
- power xxvi, xxi, 2-3, 6-9, 57, 90-1, 93, 99, 101, 151, 182, 200-1, 206, 214
see also separation of powers
- Prague 13
- prejudice 6, 26, 97, 116, 143, 169, 178, 184, 193, 196-7, 206
- priest 30, 38-9, 44, 51, 64-5, 74, 83-5, 101, 113-15, 126, 148, 178, 190, 192, 203, 210-11
see also Church; religion
- primitive man and primitivism xviii-xix, xxviii, 46, 67, 71-3, 123, 191-7
- primogeniture xxi-xxii, 147
- prince: *see* monarchy
- privilege xxv, 83, 86, 93, 97, 100, 106-7, 124, 143, 157
- procedure 108-10, 117, 148
- progress xxv, xxx, xxxii, 23-4, 27, 66, 73, 87, 129, 155, 170, 182, 192
- property xix-xx, xxiv, 9, 16-17, 24, 38-9, 42, 44, 50, 53, 66, 68-70, 98, 100, 126-8, 179-80, 195
see also liberty and, principles of
- prosperity xxvi, xxx, 53, 59-60, 71, 121, 128, 130, 164, 188, 207
- prostitution 57-8
- Protestants 171, 189
- Prussia 112
- public interest xii-xiii, xxxiii, 5-7, 16, 20-1, 61, 63, 93, 98, 118, 183
see also interest and self-interest

- public opinion xxix, 99, 122, 209
Pufendorf, Samuel, baron de xii-xv,
xxii, xxxi, 12n, 15-16
De jure naturae et gentium xiv, 12n,
15n
De officio hominis et civis xiv, 15n
punishment 112-19, 139
- Quesnay, François xxi, xxv
- Raphael 154
Raynal, abbé Guillaume x, xxvii,
56-7n, 59, 166, 199
Histoire des Deux Indes xxvii-xxviii,
xxxvii, 56-7n, 59, 166
reason 6, 8, 10, 18-19, 21, 23, 25,
27-8, 83, 85, 106, 126, 175, 186,
189, 210-11
Reddaway, W.F., ed 78
Documents of Catherine the Great 78
reform xxvii, xxviii-xxix, 88, 96, 148,
173
Réutation d'Helvétius (Diderot) 208
regeneration 183-4
Relation d'un voyage dans l'Amérique
méridionale (La Condamine) 39n
religion xix-xx, 7-8, 10, 28-30, 38,
47, 51, 58, 65, 67, 71-2, 82-5,
115, 142, 177-8, 186-9, 193,
203-4, 210
see also Church; priest
Remontrances du Parlement de Paris,
Les 3, 12n
Rennes 56n
representations 93-4, 154
representatives 82, 90, 92, 96, 100,
173
Republic (Plato) 17n
resistance 11
Rêve de d'Alembert (Diderot) xxxii,
xxxvi
revolt 108, 127, 170, 200, 210
revolution xi, xxviii, 5, 23-4, 107-8,
174, 181, 184-5, 200, 206-7, 214
see also coup d'état; English
Revolution
right: *see* natural right
Rio de Janeiro 179
Roman Campagna 40
Roman Republic 9, 14-15
Rome and Romans xxxi, 14-15, 56n,
103, 109, 148, 151-2, 154-5,
179, 186, 210
see also antiquity
Rousseau, Jean-Jacques viii-xi,
xiv-xv, xviii-xx, xxxii-xxiv, xxx,
xxxvi-xxxvii, 3, 21n, 26-8, 155
Contrat social xiv, xxxii, xxxvi, 3
Discours sur l'inégalité xviii, xxxvi,
21n
Discours sur les sciences et les arts xi
'Economie politique' xiv, 3
Emile xxxvi
Royal Society 28n
Russia and Russians xxi-xxv, xxviii,
xxxvii, 33, 78, 85-6, 89, 94-6,
101, 112, 123, 135, 138, 164
Russian senate 95
- St Augustine 30
Sainte-Catherine 179
St Paul 30
St Petersburg xxi, xxvi, 33, 56n, 78,
86n, 95, 134
Samuel, Book of 126
Satires (Horace) 35
Sauvage de Taïti, Le (anonymous) xvi
savage and savagery 39-40, 63, 69,
72-4, 100-2, 110, 123, 178,
191-7, 205-6
science xi, xxi, xxxii, xxxiv, 5, 23-4,
26, 28, 112, 130, 155-6, 170,
185, 188, 204, 207
Scythians 86
self-interest: *see* interest
Seneca xxxi
separation of powers xxiv, xxxiv, 106
see also power
serfdom xxi, xxiv-xxv, 112-13, 123,
126-8, 144, 146, 164, 185, 195,
202
Seven Years War xxvii, xxxvi, 172n
sexuality xvi-xvii, xix-xxi, xxx, xxxiii,
40, 44-5, 47-50, 54-6, 60, 64,
69-70
Shaftesbury, Anthony Ashley Cooper,
third earl of
Inquiry concerning Virtue or Merit xi
Sidney, Algernon 12n
Discourses concerning
Government 12n
slavery xv, xxvii-xxviii, xxx, 10,
15-16, 42, 62, 82, 85, 93, 99,

- slavery (*cont.*)
 126-7, 135, 151, 174, 176-7,
 194, 200, 208
 Smith, Adam xiv-xv, xxx
Theory of Moral Sentiments, The xv
Wealth of Nations, The xv
 sociability and unsociability xiii,
 xxxiii, 29, 205-6
 social contract xii-xiii, xv, xxxiii, 3, 6,
 8-11, 84, 124, 126
 society, origin of xiii-xiv, xviii-xix,
 xxxii-xxxiii, 27, 123-4, 192, 198,
 205-6, 211
see also civil society
 Socrates 98, 211
 Solon 101
 sovereignty xxv, 12-13, 15-16, 39,
 71, 81-2, 87-91, 93-4, 98-9,
 108, 111, 113, 115-16, 123, 125,
 130, 137-8, 143, 152-3, 156-7,
 161, 170, 185, 214
 Spain and Spanish 33, 46, 100, 177,
 181, 186-7, 203
 Sparta 15, 38, 123, 164
 Spinoza, Benedict 28
 stagnation: *see* corruption
 state xii, xiv, xxiv, 8-11, 13, 16, 88,
 114, 124, 137, 209
 state of nature xiii, xv, 3, 13, 15, 27,
 197, 205-6
 Straits of Magellan 36
 succession 82, 89-90, 93, 99-100,
 111-13, 142, 151
Suite de l'Apologie de l'abbé de Prades
 (Diderot) xiii, 8n
 Sully, Maximilien de Bethune, duc
 de xii, 10, 92
Mémoires 10
Supplément au Voyage de Bougainville
 (Diderot) vii-viii, xv-xxi, xxix,
 xxxii, xxxvii, 31-75, 177
Système de la nature (d'Holbach) xxxvi
 Switzerland and Swiss 13, 86, 148,
 154

 Tahiti and Tahitians xvi, xviii,
 xx-xxi, 32, 39-48, 53, 56, 60-2,
 65-70, 73-4
 Tanier 74
 Tarquins 194
 taste 36, 112, 125, 140, 154-6
 taxation xxv, 11, 106, 111, 113, 121,
 124, 127, 130, 132-4, 143,
 156-8, 171, 173
 tax-farmers 87, 132-3, 171
 Ternate 115
 Tertullian 29
Theory of Moral Sentiments, The
 (Smith) xv
 Thia 47-9, 54-5, 65
 third estate xxiv, 112, 142, 144
 Thomas, Antoine-Léonard
Essai sur le caractère des femmes xvii
 Tiberius 183
 toleration and intolerance ix-x, xii,
 29-30, 85, 171, 178
 torture 117-19
 trade and commerce xxvi-xxviii, 100,
 103, 112-13, 120, 124, 130, 132,
 134-40, 158-60, 170, 178-9,
 182, 185, 213
Traité du pouvoir des Rois de la Grande-
Bretagne (anonymous) 11n
 Trajan 183
Treatise on the rights of the Queen over
the monarchy of Spain
 (anonymous) 11
 Toussaint, François Vincent x
 Turkey 10
see also Ottoman Empire
 Turgot, baron Anne Robert
 Jacques x
 Tyburn 201
 tyrannicide xxix, 81, 188, 201-2,
 204, 207, 210
 tyranny xxvii, xxix, xxxi, 7, 29-30,
 68, 70, 72, 146, 153, 162, 170,
 182, 194, 199-204
see also despotism

 usurpation 6, 8, 11
 usury 120, 162-3
 utilitarianism and utility xci, xxxiii,
 22, 56, 61-2, 137, 155, 178, 180,
 182, 209-12
 utopia 97

 Vandeul, Abel-François-Nicolas
 Caroillon de 33
 Vandeul, Angélique xvii
 Venice 73-4, 83
 Venus 56, 154
 Vernière, Paul, ed. 78
Diderot: Œuvres politiques 78

Index

-
- vice 44, 71, 73, 84, 87, 94, 101, 103,
119, 124-5, 130, 184, 212
violence xxviii, 6-7, 18-19, 21,
27-30, 38, 42, 45, 63, 71-3, 83,
95, 170, 176, 184, 191, 194, 203,
208, 211
virtue 10, 20-2, 26, 43, 68-9, 71,
73, 85, 101, 122, 124, 130, 142,
146, 170, 172-3, 184, 207,
210-11
Voltaire ix, xdi-xdiii, xxx,
xxxvi-xxxvii
Candide xxxvi
Dictionnaire philosophique xxiii
Histoire de Charles XII xxiii
*Histoire de l'Empire sous Pierre le
Grand* xxiii
Lettres philosophiques xxxvi
Voyage autour du monde
(Bougainville) xvi, xviii, 32-3,
36-7
Wallis, Samuel xvi
Walpole, Sir Robert 96, 118
war xiii, 5, 27-8, 111-12, 123
Wealth of Nations, The (Smith) xv
Westernisation xxi-xxiv
West Indies xxvii, 169, 178, 213
women xvi-xvii, xix-xxi, 14, 36, 40,
42, 44-5, 47, 50, 62, 64, 67,
69-70, 72, 74-5, 112, 122, 146,
178
Zurich 15

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